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S E R M O N S

ON SEVERAL

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

B Y

The Rev. SLOANE ELSMERE, D.D.
Late Rector of CHELSEA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

V O L. I.



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S E R M O N I.

Of the Excellency of CHARITY.



LUKE XIV. 14.

And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompence thee; for thou shalt be recompenced at the Resurrection of the Just.



HOUGH Christianity is the noblest and most exalted Institution that ever made its Appearance upon Earth; though it raises every Virtue to a Sublimity before unthought of; though it improves and refines upon every

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Principle

2 *Of the Excellency of Charity.*

Principle and Motive to the Practice of it, and adds besides many new ones of its own, of peculiar Strength and Excellence; though in one Word, it has every Mark and Character of Divinity that can be thought of, or imagined, yet it is represented by its Enemies, as a mean and low Institution; as an Institution destructive of all true and heroic Virtue, by reducing it to selfish and interested Principles; by pressing and inculcating so strongly, the ignoble and inglorious Motives of Recompence and Reward.

There is nothing so noble and excellent, but what Ignorance, Passion, and Prejudice may cavil at. When the Humour of finding Fault prevails, there is no satisfying it. If Things were altered according to the Objector's Wish; his own Schemes would no sooner take place, than he would quarrel even with them.

And to say Truth, had Christianity been modelled as these Pretenders say it should, there would have been abundant room for Cavil and Objection: No reasonable Creature could have possibly embraced it; and these very Persons themselves would have been the first to declaim against it: They who now
decry

decry it, because of the great and glorious Recompence it promises, would then as eagerly and more justly have run it down, because it promised none. They then would have argued, and all Mankind would have joined with them, That Christianity was the most unnatural and unaccountable Institution imaginable; for that it carried our Duty to an extravagant Height; to an Height which it was very painful and irksome to human Nature to arrive at: That it insisted on Self-denial and Mortification, and the bearing of the Cross; that it commanded us to pluck out our right Eye, and to cut off our right Hand; to hate Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Lands and Possessions, yea and our own Life also; to be ready upon Occasion even to give our Bodies to be burned; and all this, without any Encouragement; without any Hope or Prospect of Recompence or Reward: Of any other at least; than a certain romantic Self-complacence, arising from the Consciousness of having acted agreeably to the eternal Reason and Fitness of Things. They would have argued, that however sublime and refined this Principle might be, it was

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certainly not calculated for such Creatures as we are. That it was a Pitch above us, much too speculative and abstracted for Beings who had any thing sensible and material in their Composition; and that therefore Christianity could not possibly be of Divine Original, because it was not adapted to the Constitution of human Nature.

Indeed the Notion of Virtue, exclusive of its Reward, is absolutely absurd and irrational. Happiness is the End of all our Pursuits; and therefore it is not in our Power to forego what we esteem our present Happiness, without having the Prospect of some future Good by way of Equivalent and in Reversion.

Christianity then proceeds agreeably to Nature and Reason, when it excites and encourages us to Obedience from the Motive of Reward: It does not make this the only Principle; No: It speaks very excellent Things of Virtue, and shews its innate Beauty and Perfection in every Light: It discovers many new Wonders of Divine Love, to attach us the more strongly to that Principle which it magnifies above all others, the Love of God. It omits, in short, no
Motive.

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Motive or Principle of Duty; on the contrary, it carries them all much farther than unassisted Reason could carry them; but then it adds as a necessary Supplement, without which it could not expect to prevail, the Motive of Reward: And this too, as it does every thing else, it carries to Perfection; for the Reward exceeds not only our Expectation, but our very Comprehension.

It is not Reward in general, but the particular Nature of the Reward, that is destructive of Virtue. Thus whatever is done with the sole View of present temporal Reward, without any Regard to God, can have no Virtue or Merit in it. This is what we properly call a selfish and interested Action: But let that same Action be done in Prospect of that future and eternal Recompence, which we know is to be the Consequence of pleasing God, and then it is a Virtue as pure and as refined, as any which can be supposed in a reasonable Creature; we scruple not to call it disinterested Virtue. It is even an Act of Religion, and a very high one too: For it is an Act of Faith, Trust, and Confidence in the Power, Veracity, and Goodness of God.

Of the Excellency of Charity.

And this Distinction runs throughout the Gospel: It is every where calling Men off from low and worldly Views, and directing their Attention Heavenwards. It is perpetually instilling into us, that whatever is done to please Men, or for present Profit and Advantage only, is lost with Regard to God; that that Profit or Advantage is all they are to expect; that nothing is acceptable in his Sight; nothing Virtue or Goodness, but what is done with a View to his Approbation and his Reward.—This is illustrated in Variety of Instances, as in Prayer, Fasting, and (what my present Subject leads me particularly to consider) Acts of Charity and Beneficence — *Thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompence thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the Resurrection of the Just.*

In discoursing further upon which Words, give me leave to stir you up to these Works of Charity and Beneficence, from the Consideration of the Excellency

Of the Principle from which they proceed,

Of the End which they propose; and,

Of the Recompence which shall attend them.

And

And First, As to the Principle from which Works of Charity and Beneficence proceed. They are temporal and worldly Views, which are destructive of Virtue and Merit, *i. e.* when they are the *only* Views; for temporal Good is not an improper Motive to Action; but a commendable one, when kept in its due Place and Subordination. As in the very Case of the Institutions now under Consideration: Their Tendency to promote the temporal Happiness of Individuals, and of Society in general, as well as to secure their eternal Happiness in the World to come, is a very heightening Circumstance in their Favour.

But in general, Virtue is pure and sincere in Proportion as it is abstracted from all inferior Considerations, and referred solely to God, and the Reward to be expected from him. And of this Nature are Works of Charity and Beneficence in the highest Degree. Every other Virtue has its peculiar temporal Recompence attending it: They meet with an immediate Return. Temperance, Sobriety and Chastity are repaid with Health, Strength, and Vigour. Honesty is, to a Proverb, the best Policy; Frugality and Industry are the surest Methods of making a

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Fortune; Humility, Courtesy, and Affability the likeliest Methods of rendering ourselves agreeable, and so on. And a Person may exercise and cultivate all these Virtues, upon these Encouragements only; without having God in all his Thoughts, or so much as believing that there is any future State. And when he does so, I believe no one will think of accusing him of Merit. — But now, with regard to Works of Charity and Beneficence, the Case is quite otherwise: For take away the Considerations of Vanity and Ostentation, (which it is in every Man's Power to take away) and there are no temporal Ends can be answered by them. So far from it, that they are rather opposite to and destructive of all such Ends: Instead of procuring us any worldly Profit and Advantage, they lessen those we already enjoy; instead of increasing our Possessions, they take from, and diminish them; for we lay out upon other People, what, if we were to pursue the Bent of our own Inclinations, we would confine wholly to ourselves; what we would add to our Provision against Misfortunes; what would contribute to the aggrandizing of our Families; what we would make minister to
our

Of the Excellency of Charity.

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our Pride, or what we would squander upon our Pleasures. Nay, if we behave right, we lay out upon others, what without any thing of Luxury and Extravagance, we could very innocently and comfortably employ upon ourselves; what, even without some Inconvenience, we cannot part with.

The Principle of Charity and Beneficence is then noble and exalted; it is not only clear of all Influence from temporal Prospects, but it prevails against them, and triumphs over them.

An Opportunity of exerting this divine Principle is now at hand. The Objects we now present to you, furnish you with a glorious one — For they cannot recompence you. Alas! they are helpless, indigent, and destitute; destitute in some sort of the Means of Happiness in both Worlds. At your Feet they throw themselves for Succour; pleading nothing but their Necessities, and hoping for nothing but from your Goodness. They have no Return to offer you; and therefore if you give Ear to their Petition, you act upon all the meritorious Principles of Humanity, heightened by Christianity. If you come in to their Relief, you are influenced by a
Fellow-

Fellow-feeling of their Infirmities; by Gratitude to your Redeemer; by the Commandments of your God; and by the Hopes of one Day receiving the Recompence of your Obedience at his Hands. Actions done upon these Principles, have every Thing requisite to render them completely acceptable: If there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, here they are; whatsoever Things are lovely, are all seated in them.

From the *Principle* from which these Works proceed, pass we on in the second Place, to the *End* which they propose; And here fresh Encouragement appears; that End and Design being, in every View, of the noblest and most excellent Kind. Arguments from both Worlds come pouring in, to support and defend it.

With regard to this World, they propose the comfortable Subsistence of our Fellow-Creatures; the feeding of the Hungry, the giving Drink to the Thirsty, and the Cloathing of the Naked. And how noble and excellent a Work this is, they who possess this World's Goods, may learn from the Value, the exorbitant Value, they set upon them. If they think, even the Vanities and
Superfluities

Superfluities of Life worthy of all that Care, and Thought, and Labour which they bestow upon them, what must they think of the Wretchedness of that Condition, which is without even the Necessaries of it? Want must be painful and miserable, in the same Proportion that Plenty is good and valuable: Indeed the Experience even of those who possess the largest Fortunes, may convince them how painful and deplorable it is; for they, in spite of all their Care and Tenderneſs, cannot totally avoid the Inclemency of Seasons. The necessary Business, Avocations, and Incidents of Life, unavoidably subject them to some small Degrees of Hunger and Thirst; and from the little Uneasiness which they feel upon these Occasions, it requires no great Reflection, to imagine what it is to be in Extremity: And consequently, how noble and excellent it is, to come in to its Relief.

The common Evils of Life, those to which every State and Condition are exposed, are various and grievous: But how swells that Heap? How heavy is the Load; when the four sore Evils of Hunger and Thirst, and Cold and Nakedness join us also? They who are in these Circumstances, have room
enough

enough for exercising their Faith and Virtue in bearing them ; and they who are rich in all Manner of Store, have a glorious Opportunity of shewing theirs in relieving them. And to give Occasion to the Exercise of these different Kinds of Virtue, was perhaps one Reason, among many others, why he who needs but open his Hand, and fill all Things living with Plenteousness, did yet think proper to permit such Difference among the Sons of Men.

Such and so great are the Miseries of wanting the Necessaries and Conveniences of Life, that every single Instance of Relief, every transient Act of Beneficence is highly valuable and commendable : A refreshing Draught, one single Morsel, is not without its Praise. But how does our Virtue rise, when it becomes provident ; when it looks forward, and is as sollicitous to procure a standing Relief for all future Distress, as it is ready to remove the present ? And it is one of the peculiar Excellencies of the Charities I am now recommending, that their Effects are permanent and extensive ; for they not only provide the Objects of them with immediate Necessaries, but by fitting them for Employment,

Employment, and preparing them for Business, they put it into their own Power to provide for themselves, during the Remainder of their Lives. This Effect is so visible, that to some it is become an Objection; for it is argued, that by means of these Charities, many Persons have risen to Stations of Honour and Profit, much above what they seem to have been designed for; to the manifest Prejudice and Injury of those who by their Birth and Family were better intitled to them. That is to say, in other Words, that Merit and Industry, in a low Sphere of Life, work their Way above high-born Indolence and Unworthiness: So indeed it sometimes happens — And may it always happen — For would it not be infinitely better for the World, if it did? But Instances of this Kind, in these Institutions, are I am persuaded, much rarer than is imagined: The low Nature of the Education in them rendering it impossible they should be frequent: They can never happen but in Cases of singular and distinguished Abilities; and these Cases we know to be very rare and uncommon also. But when they do happen, when a Genius capable of forcing its Way
through

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through the many Disadvantages, makes its Appearance, (as perhaps it is not in our Power to suppress it) so it is barbarous both to him and to our Country to endeavour it. There is then surely but little Cause of Jealousy upon this Score:—And as to their prospering in a moderate Way, and their enjoying in common with other People, those Advantages of Life, which are the natural and deserved Rewards of Honesty and Industry, this is the very Thing we aim at. And to object that they do this, is to object to the Success of the Scheme; and has too strong a Tincture of infernal Envy, to proceed from a virtuous Mind.

And as the Effects of these Charities are permanent, taking in the whole Lives of the Objects, so are they extensive also, descending to their Children: For the Provision for the first Family, may be the Means of Provision for succeeding Families for many Generations. These Charities, therefore, do not only relieve Men when they are poor, but better still, they prevent their becoming so.

But enough of the temporal Effects of Charity; its noblest Purpose is still behind: Its Design upon the Soul. The Soul is as
much

much the Object of Charity as the Body; it is indeed more so in Proportion, as it is more valuable; as Hell is worse than Poverty; as Heaven is higher than Earth; as Eternity demands more Consideration than Time.

Ignorance and Vice are the great Evils to which the Soul is exposed, and consequently what Charity is ever labouring to deliver it from. This was the Principle which gave Birth to the Institution now under Consideration; and one would think nothing more need be said to recommend it to a Christian Audience.

For a Christian Audience must be deeply sensible of the infinite Blessings and Advantages of Christian Knowledge. They must be sensible, what Happiness it is to be put into the Way of Salvation; and to be guarded and prepared against the many Difficulties and Dangers to be met with in it. They who glory in the Light of the Gospel, cannot surely help having Compassion upon those who sit in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death. To enlighten the clouded Eye, to strengthen the weak Hands, and to guide the wandering Feet into the Way of Peace, are the generous Dictates of Humanity; and are,
besides,

besides, peculiarly bound upon Christians by every Tie, every Obligation imaginable.

To answer, as much as may be, this great and glorious End; to discharge, in good Measure, this high and indispensable Obligation; Instruction in Righteousness is provided for the Young and Ignorant. The lively Oracles of God, which alone are able to make them wise unto Salvation, are put into their Hands; and they taught to read therein all the Days of their Life. The Principles of this reformed Church, of which they have the Blessing to be born Members; and a due Regard and Veneration for it, are diligently instilled into them.—The great practical Doctrines and Duties of Christianity are daily explained and inculcated; and the Practice of them enforced by the powerful Considerations of its tremendous Punishments and its glorious Rewards. And as every Scene of Life has its particular Temptations to which it is most exposed; a particular Band of Crimes which do most vigorously beset it; those to which the Situation of the Persons, now under Consideration; is open and liable, are particularly guarded against: Such are Dishonesty, Drunkenness, Debauchery;

bauchery; Lying, Swearing, and all manner of Profaneness: The Wickedness of these Things, and the desperate Condition, both here and hereafter, of those who indulge themselves in the Practice of them, is continually set before them; and for their further Security against these and all other Crimes, that they may grow in Grace, and make Proficiency in Goodness, that they may become Vessels of Mercy, fitted and prepared for everlasting Happiness and Glory; to secure, I say, and to increase this Fruit of their Labour, they are taught the Necessity, and habituated to the Practice of daily Devotion. Without this every thing else is useless and ineffectual; for nothing but this can preserve a continued Sense of Religion upon our Minds; which Sense is the only standing Restraint upon our Behaviour.

In a Word; they are nourished up in the Words of Faith and of good Doctrine, trained up in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord; and so have abundantly ministered unto them, an Entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are as Firebrands plucked out

of the Fire; snatched and rescued from all that Ignorance and Impiety, with which, to our eternal Infamy and Reproach, the lower Part of Mankind is so desperately overrun. We, whose Province it is to converse with Mankind in their last Moments; in those Moments in which, if ever they are open and undisguised, have but too many Opportunities of being convinced of the general Ignorance and Vitiousness of the World. How mortifying is it to us to preach to them Christ Jesus in the Agonies of Death; and how painful also to see the many Miscarriages and the last Workings of a well-meaning Mind, then opening to a Sense of its Misfortune? How terrible is the Thought of a Person's appearing at the Bar of his Redeemer, without knowing any thing more of him than his Name? And how unworthy of a Christian Country, that there should be any Instances of such deplorable Ignorance to be met with.

Can there then be Objection to these Institutions? From what Quarter can it arise? From what Topick can human Wit or human Malice draw it? For who can object
to

to the Salvation of Souls: Not they surely who believe they have Souls of their own to be saved.

Who can object to Education in the Principles of the established Church? Not they; surely, who are averse to Popery; for the Knowledge of the Bible is the best Preservative against that.

Even they who have no Religion at all cannot consistently object; for however slightly they themselves may think of Religion, it is their Interest, and they own it, that every body about them should have it; for otherwise they cannot be safe: They cannot enjoy either Life or Property with Security. What then is said against them? for many there are that find fault: Why it is said,

That Knowledge is not quite so necessary as we represent it; that a very little of that is sufficient; provided there be but Honesty; and that very ignorant People may be very useful People. Now they who reason thus, must surely forget, that necessary Knowledge is all that is contended for: Nothing more than what is sufficient to put Men into the Way of Salvation. And if there be any

Knowledge necessary in this View for one Part of the Species, the same is necessary also for the other; for there is but one Road to Heaven, and that Poor and Rich are equally concerned and obliged to know.—But if the Knowledge of Christianity be of so little Importance, why was it revealed with so much Pomp and Glory? And why is the Happiness of those who enjoy its Sun-shine so magnified? For by this Way of Reasoning, we might e'en as well have been without it.

But Honesty is a much more valuable Quality than Knowledge, be it so; but without Knowledge how are we to become honest: Virtue is not necessary and innate; it is not stamped upon us at our Birth; or if the Principle of it may be said to be born with us, it is certainly to be drawn forth, cultivated, and improved by Reason, Instruction, and Education. We are to be taught the Nature, the Obligation, and the Consequence of Virtue—And the Fear of God is to be laid down, as its only solid Foundation — And such is the only religious Knowledge we aim at.

But People may be at the same Time both very ignorant and very useful; that is to say,

I suppose they may work very hard, for in all Senses they cannot be so useful; for Ignorance disqualifies them for many of the most important Services in Life — And Vice and Infidelity, for Places of Trust and Confidence. But supposing that they were entirely as useful, yet this Way of thinking is mean and selfish; for it makes plain, that we have no manner of Regard to the Persons who serve us; that we are only concerned about ourselves; nay even to that Degree, as to be content that they should risque their eternal Happiness, that they might the more conduce to our temporal.

It is said, moreover, that Knowledge puffeth up; that it ministers to Pride and Sauciness, and raises the Children of the Poor above those menial and laborious Employments for which both Nature and their Country designed them. If this be ever the Case, it is the Fault of the Persons; against which no Institutions, however wisely calculated, can in all Cases possibly guard. There is, I am sure, no Foundation for such Pride, in the Institutions themselves; no other Knowledge of any kind being intended, than what is necessary.

It is said, lastly, that the good Effects of these Charities are not so visible as might be expected: That notwithstanding all our Boasts of Religion and Virtue, the Persons educated in these Schools, do not appear to have more than their uninstructed Neighbours; nay, that they very often give but too good Proof that they have much less; and thereby give Occasion to the Enemies of Religion to speak reproachfully — But to this it is answered, that the true Way of judging of any Scheme or Institution, is from its Nature and Tendency; from its Aptness to produce its designed Effect, rather than from its actual Success. And if we judge after this Manner in the present Case, it will be impossible to imagine any thing better calculated to produce the Practice of Religion and Virtue, than these Institutions: For the Persons admitted are young and tender; their native Innocence as yet untainted; their Minds as yet free from Prejudice and Prepossession; and consequently at full Liberty to receive the Impressions of Religion and Virtue. And these are stamped deep; they are perpetually enforced and inculcated by all the Motives which Christianity suggests.

The

The Strength of Education is acknowledged to be more prevalent than most other Things: What Children first imbibe, is what in after Life they are commonly most tenacious of: This Care then is taken, (which is the utmost that can be taken) to give Religion the first Possession.

But if this fails, and the Objects of our Care turn out Reprobates, in spite of all that can be done; is this more than what happens to other Persons? Does higher Life afford no Instances of good Education thrown away? Shall therefore all Education be laid aside? The Christian Religion is absolutely fitted to produce the Practice of the most perfect Righteousness among Men, and yet the Generality of Men do not practise it. Shall then the Christian Religion be discarded — This Reasoning therefore, if it proves any thing, proves too much; for it will prove, that all Schemes and Purposes, however good and excellent in themselves, ought to be discouraged, if they do not obtain their Ends in all and every Instance: No Matter how much Good they do; how often they obtain their Ends, if they do but miss of it sometimes,

times, though even very seldom in Comparison, that is enough to overthrow them.

In fine; these charitable Institutions are, in a religious View, absolutely excellent and noble; and in a temporal one, highly useful and advantageous, notwithstanding what is said against them: But if these Objections were more and better founded than they are, yet as they all proceed upon temporal Reasons, they ought to give way to those of a spiritual and a religious Nature. Religion is the grand and general Concern of the whole Species; that therefore is to be studied in Preference to all other Matters whatsoever. Every Man has a Right to the Knowledge of it, every Man is bound to endeavour after it; and every Man who has attained it, is bound by all the Means and Methods in his Power, to direct and conduct others to it.

Such are the Reasons which support these Charities in general; and for extending them to the Female Sex they are doubly strong — For Want and Poverty peculiarly exposes that Sex to absolute Ruin both of Soul and Body — That Sex peculiarly calls for the Aid and Assistance of Religion to guard and secure it,
against

against the Treachery and Villainy of the other — It calls for it peculiarly, because of the Desperateness of their Condition if ever they are faulty: They never recover their Credit with Man, and there is great Danger of their not recovering it with God; for they have conquered every thing before they can be vicious. They call for it particularly because their Influence is both great and extensive — It is great; for many are the Families we daily see preserved from Ruin by their good Conduct and Oeconomy, in spite of all that the Intemperance and Debauchery of the other Sex can do to destroy it. And on the other hand, where the Mistress of a Family is debauched and intemperate, it is not in the Power of all the Sobriety and Industry that can be in Man to preserve it; — Their Influence is extensive also, because the Farm, the Merchandise, a large Estate, or a publick Station engrossing the Time and Thoughts of a Father of a Family; the Education of Children is the Care of the Mother; of those of both Sexes for some Time, and of those of her own Sex intirely. — The Consequences therefore of her good Education descend to her Posterity, perhaps for many Generations.

Lastly,

Lastly. To the religious Education of the Females are we particularly encouraged from the Prospect of Success. The Principles of Religion make a deep and lasting Impression upon their Minds; an Impression, which is not without great Pains and Difficulty to be erased. Whether it be, that their more retired Way of Life lays them less open to Dangers, or that Religion strikes in more with their natural Goodness of Disposition; so it is, that good Education is very seldom thrown away upon them: They answer the Goodness and Piety of our Design much oftener than the other Sex.

Having thus considered the Principle and End of Charity, there wants nothing to complete the View, but the Recompence which shall attend it. And this we are told in the Text, shall be at the Resurrection of the Just. And need we more? Is not this enough to make the rich and wealthy retrench somewhat of their Vanities and Superfluities, to lay out in this Way? Is not this enough to make him who has prospered at the Farm and the Merchandise, to appropriate some Part of their Gains to this Use? Is not this enough to make him who supports himself

himself by the Sweat of his Brow, labour somewhat more to be able to give to him that needeth? And is not this enough to make those whose whole Living is but two Mites, to throw one of them into the Treasury of God? The Recompence at the Resurrection of the Just will answer all Demands; will fully discharge all Debts which the Almighty shall have contracted upon the Account of his needy and indigent Servants. The Rich will have a Treasure that never faileth, in Lieu of a corruptible one — The Husbandman shall receive an hundred fold. — The Merchant shall have his own with Usury — The Workman shall be overpaid in Wages — And they whose Compassion makes them sometimes want a Meal, shall eat Bread to the full in the Kingdom of God.

Though therefore these little ones have no Recompence to make you, yet God their Almighty and All-gracious Patron abundantly supplies that Defect: His Promises have made it infinitely more blessed to give than to receive. By your charitable Contributions you become your own Benefactors; and are in Truth kinder to yourselves than to the Objects of your Bounty. This may be
thought

thought odd Language for a Petitioner, but so the Fact is. And therefore I solicit you, not only because I seek yours, but you. I seek not only the Success and Prosperity of this Institution, which I am sure is good and Christian, but I seek also Fruit that may abound to your Account, to your Edification and Salvation.

And so you will find it at the Resurrection of the Just. In that tremendous Day, when the grand Question, which shall decide your Fate to all Eternity, shall be put, What hungry have you fed? What thirsty have you refreshed? What naked have you cloathed? These, and all they also, who through their Means reap the Benefit of your Goodness, shall appear before the Throne of Grace as Vouchers in your Favour. They shall answer and say, We were hungry and these fed us; we were thirsty and these gave us Drink; we were naked and these cloathed us; we were ignorant and these instructed us: This rescued us from Wickedness and Vice, brought us from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto thee, O God. In one Word, under thy Providence, these were the Instruments of our Salvation.

Conversion

Conversion of Sinners is represented as the highest Merit. All good and righteous Persons shall indeed have their Reward: They shall shine as the Brightness of the Firmament: But they that turn many to Righteousness, shall be like Stars in that Firmament; supereminently bright and conspicuous. And if among these there be Degrees in Lustre, if one Star differeth from another Star in Glory, among the brightest must they appear, who do not so properly convert Sinners from the Errors of their Way; as prevent their becoming Sinners. This is the highest Degree of this kind of Merit; and is as much preferable to what is commonly called Conversion, as Innocence is better than REPENTANCE.

S E R M O N

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF CHARLES THE FIRST
BY JOHN BURNET
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
IN TWO VOLUMES
THE FIRST

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
AND THE BEST EDITIONS
BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES
THE SECOND

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
AND THE BEST EDITIONS
BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES
THE THIRD

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
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BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES
THE FOURTH

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
AND THE BEST EDITIONS
BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES
THE FIFTH

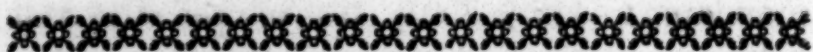
FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
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BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES
THE SIXTH



S E R M O N II.

*Of communing with our own
Hearts.*



PSALM iv. 4.

— *Commune with your own Hearts.*

 A N is a curious and inquisitive Being: His Passion for Knowledge is strong and natural—But then the Guidance and Direction of this, as of all his other Passions, is put in his own Power: Nature implants the useful Passion, and leaves the Management of it to ourselves.

Hence

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Hence it comes to pass, that we often make an ill Use of this Passion, either by placing it on an improper Object, or by exerting it towards a proper one, with a greater or less Degree of Intenseness than it deserves. We see Men every Day rising up early and sitting up late; labouring with unwearied Diligence in the Pursuit of some trifling and insignificant Piece of Knowledge; a Piece of Knowledge, which if obtained, will be beneficial neither to himself, nor to the World. Others again are employed in useful Inquiries, and so far they are indeed commendable: They study the liberal Arts and Sciences; and a noble Study they are. The Knowledge of these is useful, both to the World and to the Inquirer: They yield the greatest Benefit to Mankind; and one of the highest and most exalted Pleasure and Satisfaction to a rational Being. But then we may be, we often are, faulty with regard to the Degree of Earnestness with which we apply ourselves to these Studies. Noble and useful as they are, they may yet be pursued with too great, even with a criminal Application. Though they deserve a good Degree of Attention, yet they deserve not all our
Attention,

Attention, and therefore should not engross it.

There are other Things worth knowing as well as they. Nay, there is in Truth another Piece of Knowledge which is infinitely superior to them all: In Comparison with this, the Arts and Sciences have no Glory, by reason of the Glory that excelleth. This Knowledge is of all others the most noble, the most useful, and the most difficult too. *It is the Knowledge of ourselves.* By which I mean, not the physical Knowledge of our material Frame, or particular Constitutions; but the Knowledge of ourselves as *moral Agents*: The Knowledge of our Relation to God; of the Duties which flow from that Relation; and of our Manner of discharging them. This is the Study we should be employed in; here our Diligence and Application can never be excessive: This should engross us, at least so far, as to suffer no other Study to break in upon, or interfere with it. And yet so desperately foolish are the Sons of Men, that this is the only Knowledge they neglect; they seem not to be sensible of its Value. They will spare no Pains; they will think they can never bestow enough

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upon all the various Branches of human or natural Learning; but will grudge to throw away a Moment upon the Study of themselves. They will pry into the Writings of the Antients, and set before us, with wondrous Care and Ingenuity, both their Beauties and their Blemishes — They are employed in examining into the Appearances of Nature; in searching into the Properties of Bodies; in fixing their Laws of Motion; and in forming of Systems — They will dig into the Earth to come at its inmost Secrets; to pry into its Bowels. Neither Height nor Depth will check their Progress; for they will climb up into Heaven too, and there view the Magnitude, Situation, and Motion of the heavenly Bodies; tell the Number of the Stars, and call them all by their Names. In such Matters as these how many consume their Days, without ever once turning their Eyes inward: great Adepts indeed they become in the Knowledge of Nature, but continue absolute Strangers to themselves — Nay, they whose very Study is *Virtue*, the Theory of it I mean; they who are busied in enumerating, defining, and dividing the Virtues; in expatiating upon their Beauty and Obligation, and
in

Of communing with our own Hearts. 35

in marking out the almost imperceptible Lines which sever them from their bordering Vices; even these are often as little acquainted with the Practice of them, have as little *moral Knowledge* of themselves, as they whose Studies are of a more foreign Nature.

It is not Knowledge in the general that renders a Man more valuable, No; but it is such Knowledge as is proper for him, and suitable to him. We are differently situated in Life, placed in different Circumstances and Stations, and undertake different Employments; that Knowledge then which is agreeable to our particular Situation or Profession, is the only Knowledge which can make us truly Praise-worthy. All other Knowledge is out of Character; it is undoubtedly so, if it prevents our improving in that which does properly belong to us. And as there is thus a Knowledge proper to the different Circumstances of Men, so is there likewise one proper to Mankind in general: The Knowledge which becomes them, which alone can make them truly commendable, is the *Knowledge of themselves*. This is our proper Work; in this should we be busied: This is the Study suitable to our Circumstances;

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and therefore without this, the most knowing in other Particulars, the greatest Professer in the Arts and Sciences, is absolutely a *Fool*.

What the moral Writers mean by *knowing ourselves*, the Scriptures express by *communing with our own Hearts*: At least, to *commune with our Hearts* is the Way to *know ourselves*: For our *Hearts* are our *moral selves*; and the Way to *know* them, is (the same which we take to know any Person) to *commune or converse with them*.

Now it is my Design in this Discourse to lay before you,

First, The Necessity of communing with our own Hearts. And

Secondly, The valuable Consequences of such Conduct.

And First, The Necessity of communing with our own Hearts will appear from the high Importance it is of, to have a *right Heart*. A good Man is, in Scripture-Language, a Man of perfect Heart; a Man whose Heart is right in the Sight of the Lord. And on the other Hand, a wicked Man is said to be one whose Heart is not right; and Wickedness is in general stiled, the

the Naughtiness of the Heart. *Solomon* advises us to keep our Heart with all Diligence, for (or because) out of it are the Issues of Life. The Heart is the Source or Fountain from which all our Actions flow; and such as the Fountain is, such will be the Streams that issue from it. Our outward Actions owe their Morality to the Principle which gives Birth to them, and this Principle is the Heart; as this then is well or ill inclined, good or evil must we be pronounced: The Man takes his Character from the *Disposition* of his *Heart*, A good Heart makes a whole Life one continued Act of Religion: Even our most trifling and indifferent Actions it consecrates into *Virtues*; and as to what is wrong in us, though it cannot indeed make what is wrong right, yet it will *excuse* it. A Mistake may be committed even with Integrity of Heart; and whatever is so committed, cannot be blame-worthy: Nay, even presumptuous Sins shall be atoned for by the Sincerity of the Heart. Such is the Infirmary of human Nature, that Men of the best Hearts do sometimes fall from their Stedfastness; and knowingly and deliberately

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commit Things worthy of Death: But then they become soon pricked at the Heart; their Hearts, honest at Bottom, quickly recoil: They return with Violence to their former Situation, and recover their former Uprightness. In a Word; a good Heart is a constant Oblation; 'tis perpetual Incense. And as a perfect Heart thus sanctifies our whole Being, a depraved one has no less Influence to the contrary. Every Action partakes of the Corruption of the Heart, which leavens the whole Lump; it diffuses itself through our whole Lives, tainting every Action of them with its Malignity.

Since then the Disposition of the Heart is of such Consequence; since we are good or bad Men according as that is well or ill inclined; in a Word, since the whole depends upon the *Heart*; how infinitely careful should we be, that all be right there? With what Diligence and Exactness should we search and examine into this Fountain of all that is good or evil in us? How continually should we converse or commune with our Hearts, to find out, if possible, their true Temper and Disposition? And this Reason-
ing

ing receives an additional Strength from another Consideration, *The Difficulty of knowing them.*

It is an Observation of the Prophet (and Experience bears Witness to the Truth of it) that the Heart is deceitful above all Things and desperately wicked, who can know it? It's Workings are infinitely deceitful; it's Windings and Turnings various and subtle; There is no Form which it cannot put on; and it is so commonly disguised, that it is not easy to know when it appears in its native Colours. The blackest Heart sometimes assumes the fairest Covering: The most wicked can put on the Garb of Religion; so artfully put it on, as not only to impose upon others, but even on the very Man whose Heart it is. This is demonstrable from that Variety of Pretences which we frequently make use of to justify the worst of Actions: These Pretences, sometimes so thin, that every Stander-by can see through them, are however abundantly sufficient in the Opinion of their Authors. They will tell us, that however their Conduct may appear in our Eyes, for which they are not accountable, yet it is

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justifiable in their own; for that they know the Sincerity of their Hearts; and this, it is thought, is at once sufficient to stop the Mouths of their Accusers: For where there is *Sincerity*, there can be no *blame*.

It is true indeed, that Sincerity is abundant Justification; but before we plead this Excuse, we should take no little Care, that we can plead it truly. Sincerity is a Term common in most Men's Mouths; there is no Word in Nature so prostituted and profaned: For under its Cover have the greatest Impieties been committed; the most blasphemous Hereticks that ever dishonoured the Christian Name have all pleaded Sincerity: The Arian denies the Lord that bought him, in the Sincerity of his Heart. The Christian Sacraments, and indeed every Act of Christian Worship, are all vilified and depreciated out of the sincerest Regard for true primitive Christianity. Nay, even the Infidel himself discards Christianity in general in the Integrity of his Heart; and notwithstanding all its glaring Evidences, becomes apostate, out of mere Love of Truth. The Jews may in the same Manner plead Sincerity of Heart,
even

even for the very Act of crucifying their Messiah.

For to entitle us to the Character of *sincere*, it is not enough that we act agreeably to our *present Opinion*. Were this all, those I have now mentioned, might reasonably urge it; for there are undoubtedly those whose present Persuasion it is, that the *Son* is a Creature. There are certainly many who think meanly and contemptibly of the positive Duties of Christianity: There are those who imagine Christianity to be an Impostor; and it may, I think, be safely allowed, that some at least of the Jews concurred in the Crucifixion of our Lord, out of their great Regard to the Law of *Moses*. *Present Persuasion* then is not sufficient, No! We must look back a little, and inquire how we came by this *Persuasion*; how our *present Opinions* were contracted. We must commune with our own Hearts, and examine carefully, whether or no it was not some Root of Bitterness *there*, which gave Occasion to them. We know by Experience, that we are not always so unbiaſſed as to be influenced by a Love of Truth only: We know on the contrary, that
our

our Passions and Inclinations take a Part in all our Inquiries; and these are so many Bribes which blind the Eyes of our judging Faculty. Our present Opinion then may not always be the Result of an impartial Inquiry; so far from it, that it may perhaps be the Sentence of a corrupt Judge; and if so, What becomes of our boasted Sincerity? — Our present real Opinions may therefore be the Result of the greatest Insincerity. Pride and an Affectation of Singularity may give Birth to the Contempt both of the Son and of his Ordinances: And these, joined with the Love of forbidden Pleasures, may produce the Infidel. These irregular Passions may affect our Inquiries; they may induce us to dwell most upon the favourite Side of a Question; they may induce us to give all imaginable Attention and Indulgence to the Witnesses on one Side, but in good Measure to suppress the Evidences on the other: Nay, supposing a fair Hearing, they can even vitiate the Understanding. The Heretick may then injure Christianity, the Infidel may deny it, and the Jew may crucify his Messiah, all in consequence of their *present real Opinions*;
and

and yet have not the least Title to Sincerity; because these their present Opinions are owing to their Pride, their Passions, and their Obstinacy, (*i. e.*) they are owing to their *Insincerity*.

Herein then lies the Deceitfulness of the Heart; that it makes us mistake our true Character, and pronounce ourselves honest and sincere, even in those very Instances in which we are guilty of the greatest Dishonesty and Insincerity: That it occasions sometimes our making the loudest Pretences to Sincerity, when (God knows) we have not the least Title to it.

Our Hearts (unless we take the greatest Care to prevent them) are indeed continually imposing on us. They are ever mistaking and miscalling our Actions: They flatter us in our own Sight; and are ever holding before us a false Glass, wherein to view ourselves. Hence it comes to pass, that we frequently confound the Principles of our Actions, and fondly ascribe that to Religion, with which, could our Hearts be seen, it would appear Religion had nothing to do. An Action outwardly good does not always flow from a good Principle: It may proceed sometimes

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sometimes from a *bad*, very often from an *indifferent* Motive. We may, for Instance, relieve the Neccessitous out of Vanity, as well as out of Charity; we may be just out of Self-Interest, and temperate out of regard to our Constitution, as well as out of a Sense of Duty: And we may attend at the Sanctuary and at the Altar to serve ourselves, as well as to serve God. These self same outward Actions we see may proceed from very different Principles; and herein again consists the Deceitfulness of our Hearts, that they very often mistake the true Principles; for they are sure always to assign the best. The Actions are outwardly good, and our Hearts will take care that we shall not lose the Merit of them for want of a good Principle.

Thus deceitful above all Things are our Hearts; but could Men be persuaded to look a little more narrowly into, and converse a little more frequently with them, the Cheat could neither be long nor successfully carried on. By searching into the Principles of our Actions, we should soon find how little real Goodness there was in them, notwithstanding all that false Glitter which surrounded them; we should soon find Reason to alter our
Opinion

Opinion of ourselves; for we should, to our infinite Sorrow and Mortification find, that we were by no means the Men we took ourselves for.

Would we be secure of the Sincerity and Uprightness of our Hearts, we should endeavour, by frequent Conversation with them, to come at their true Temper and Disposition. We should sift them to the Bottom; we should canvass and examine them with the utmost Nicety and Exactness; we should leave no Scheme, no Artifice, untried, to get the better of these great Deceivers. And the best Way to do this, the likeliest Way to know ourselves, is to put *self* as much as possible out of the Question; that is, to consider our Actions abstractedly from the Relation they bear to ourselves: To consider them not as our *own* Actions, but as the Actions of some other Person, about whom we have no Concern. The same Actions, we shall find, will appear in very different Lights in these different Views — And in order to be secure of the Principles of our Actions, we would do well to put some Questions to our Hearts upon that Subject. As the same good Actions may proceed
from

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from contrary Principles, it would be expedient to ask ourselves, Whether or no we continue to perform what is outwardly good, in Cases, where, if the Action be at all performed, it can proceed from no other Motive than what is good? As for Instance; if we omit no Acts of Charity and Compassion, where Charity and Compassion can be the only Motives; where Vanity and Ostentation are impossible; — If we deal justly and uprightly with our Neighbour, not only when such Conduct makes for our temporal Interest, but likewise when it is directly opposite to, and destructive of it — If we are sober and temperate, notwithstanding we know we have Strength sufficient to bear with Excesses — And if we attend upon the Ordinances of Religion, when Devotion can be the only Design; and if we have Courage and Resolution enough to persevere in that Attendance, in spite of all the Ridicule of a licentious World!

The Necessity of communing with our own Hearts being thus made evident, both from the Importance it is of to have well-disposed Hearts, and likewise from the Difficulty of knowing when they are so; it
may

may naturally be asked, How frequent should this Communing or Conversation be? The Answer is, *The oftener the better*; too often it cannot be. The Circumstances of Men are different; and therefore some have more Opportunities of conversing with themselves than others; but this I think may in the general be affirmed, that some Part or other of every Day ought to be employed in this necessary Affair. If it be objected, that it is impossible for Men of Business, for Men engaged in the Hurry of Life, to spare a Part of every Day for this Work; let the Men of Business, who have the Confidence to make this Objection, to their Confusion remember, how they behave with regard to their temporal Concerns. It is usual with them to have what they call their *Day-Books*, (i. e.) Books wherein all the foreseen Business of the Day is minuted down, and the Transactions of it registered. These Books, the careful Men never fail every Night to review, and thereby become acquainted with the State and Condition of their Affairs: This Work is upon no Occasion to be neglected; however wearied out with Labour and Travel, they will not give Sleep to their Eyes, nor Slumber
to

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to their Eyelids, till they have first finished their Day's Account. Can these Worldlings remember this, and yet complain that they cannot spare a Moment for the Review of their moral Conduct? Every Thing, it seems, has its Time, but Religion: There is a Time to get, and a Time to lose; a Time to amass Riches, and a Time to squander them; a Time for Business, and a Time for Pleasure: In short; to every thing there is a Season, and a Time to every Purpose under the Heavens, but only for Religion: For that, there never comes a convenient Season. This, come when it will, is always sure to be troublesome; always to interfere either with our Business or our Pleasure.

But to engage us to a frequent Communing with our own Hearts, let us consider,

Secondly, What would be the valuable Consequences of such Conduct.

And First. Frequent communing with our own Hearts would teach us, *to reverence ourselves*. It is too common with Mankind to indulge themselves in secret, in what they would be very unwilling the World should have any Knowledge of: They are exceedingly fond of a fair Outside, and are
very

very often content with it too. Their Study is too often employed not in endeavouring to conquer their Vices, but only to conceal them; as if they thought that concealed Vices were no Vices. But frequent Conversation with their own Hearts would soon cure them of this vile Hypocrisy; this would teach them to stand more in Awe of themselves, than of all the rest of Mankind put together. It would make us value not so much what the World thinks of us, as what we think of ourselves; it would teach us to labour after and deserve *our own Esteem*. A good Reputation is undoubtedly highly valuable; but this communing with ourselves would soon make us loath the Applauses of the World, if not seconded with the Applause and Approbation of our own Hearts. We should soon begin to know the Value of Self-Approbation, and instead of bartering away this inestimable Jewel for the Good-Will and good Opinion of others, we should laugh at every thing which should attempt to rob us of it. In short; frequent Conversation with our own Hearts, would teach us to consider how we can justify our Conduct (not to the

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World) but to ourselves — And to think nothing *secret* which *we ourselves are privy to*.

But Secondly. By a frequent communing with our own Hearts, we should *acquire a Habit of religious Care and Circumspection*. With regard to Religion, the Bulk of Mankind live at Random; they consider not that they do Evil; they pass their Days giddy and unthinking, what with Business and Diversion, allowing not a Moment for a religious Reflection. But communing with their own Hearts would soon teach them another Conduct: This would soon call them off from their various Folly; and quickly give them a more serious Turn: This would teach them to think soberly; to consider their Ways; and impartially to reflect upon the Consequences of Things. Nor would this communing with ourselves teach us only religious Meditation in the general, but it would likewise give us a Habit of Care and Circumspection; for as in our Self-Examination, our whole Conduct and every single Part of it is brought into Judgment, and we call ourselves to an Account even for our most trifling
Actions,

Actions, this would naturally make us careful to avoid even the least Irregularity; and would produce in us such a Circumspection, as would effectually prevent those little Indecencies of Behaviour, which are so many Spots and Blemishes in the Lives of some of the best Christians.

Thirdly. Frequent communing with ourselves would teach us to *consider Religion as our Business*. The Word *Business* seems to be altogether appropriated to temporal Affairs; the Conduct of Mankind will, I am sure, justify this Observation. As for Religion, it is well if it be not absolutely and entirely thrown aside; but if it be ever thought of, it seems only to be in our leisure Hours, by way of Amusement, when we have nothing else to do: For it is most certain, that Religion, instead of being suffered to interrupt our temporal Affairs, is made to give way to them; nay, even to that Degree, that temporal Business shall be given in Excuse for the Neglect of our Spiritual.

But now by frequent communing with ourselves, we should soon change our Behaviour in this Particular. Consideration

52. *Of communing with our own Hearts.*

would soon make us sensible of the Value and Importance of Religion ; and consequently of the Esteem and Regard which it deserves : And the daily Examination of our *Religion*, as well as of our *worldly* Conduct, would lead us to look upon *Religion*, to be at least *as much* our *Business*, as our *temporal Affairs*. And if this be once obtained, that Religion shall have an equal Share with other Things in our Thoughts, its own Force will quickly render it *superior*.

Fourthly. Frequent communing with our own Hearts would *bring us to that State of Perfection in Righteousness, which Christianity requires and expects from us*. By this thorough Scrutiny into our Lives and Conversations, it is impossible to avoid remarking what Progress we make in Righteousness. As our Examination is *daily*, we cannot help remembering our Yesterday's Faults; and one Head of To-day's Inquiry is, whether those Faults have been repeated. If too, we are sensible that what we call our good Performances, were not so good, so perfect as they might be, we proceed to examine whether they have been since better and more perfect

perfect than formerly. Thus Growth in Righteousness is the necessary Consequence of this Conduct: He who thus communes with his own Heart, does naturally proceed from Strength to Strength, from one Degree of Righteousness to another, till at last he arrives (as far as this State of Infirmary will permit) to the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ;

Fifthly. This communing with our own Hearts will *fill us with a well grounded Hope and Assurance of the divine Favour and Mercy.* If our Hearts condemn us not, says the Apostle, then have we Confidence towards God. Communing with our Hearts is in order to prevent their condemning us; and if this Communing be performed as it should be, it will most certainly have that Effect: For its Design is to search out what is amiss in them, in order to Correction and Amendment.

When then, by this daily Correction and Amendment, we have assured our Hearts before God; we have the steadfast Hope of his Favour, for the Anchor of our Souls.

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Most Men, as I before observed, live in a giddy and unthinking State with regard to Religion: They are ignorant of their true spiritual State, and consequently ignorant of what they are to expect at God's Hand; but surely eternal Happiness is too great a Stake to be in Doubt of. To be uncertain whether we shall be happy or miserable to all Eternity, is surely a Misery next to that which is in Question. Would you then be satisfied as to this important Point, commune with your own Hearts; search them accurately; examine your Lives diligently; compare your Actions impartially with the Laws of God; and then you will assign to yourselves your proper Portion: You may truly judge yourselves, the Voice of Conscience being the Voice of God.

Lastly. Communing with our own Hearts is necessarily *productive of that Peace and Serenity of Mind in which alone true Happiness consists.* Whatever may be the common Notion of Happiness, and wherever it may be sought for, it is most certain, that all true Happiness is *at home.* Men may run from Place to Place, and from one Amusement to another

another in Pursuit of it; but he is mistaken in the Road: What he wants is here; 'tis within him. The Seat of Happiness is the Mind; if that is rightly disposed, nothing external can deprive him of it; if it is distempered, nothing external can relieve him.

Let us then look for Happiness where alone it can be found; in ourselves, in our own Hearts. Our Hearts are designed to be the Instruments of our Happiness: Let us then commune with them, in order to make them so; let us take Care that nothing be left in them, which is disagreeable or offensive. On the contrary, let us purge and cleanse them so thoroughly, that we may always look into them with Pleasure and Complacency; let us make agreeable Companions, let us make Friends of them. Would we do this, we should take Delight in conversing with them; we should not then think it so intolerable an Evil, as some do, to be *alone*. Indeed we could not be alone, for we should always carry our Company, our best Company along with us. All external Entertainments would then be looked upon as foreign to our Hap-

56 *Of communing with our own Hearts.*

piness; when we had a mind to enjoy that without Interruption, we should retire into ourselves; and there take our Fill of those Joys which spring from the Approbation of our own Minds, and its necessary Consequence, the full Assurance of the divine Favour. These are the only Sources of never-cloying and never-failing Happiness. They are Wells of Salvation springing up into everlasting Life.



SERMON



S E R M O N III.

Of the Offences taken against Christianity.



St. MATTHEW xi. 6.

*And blessed is he whosoever shall not
be offended in me.*

Notwithstanding the abundant Evidence, the many infallible Proofs, which our blessed Saviour gave of his divine Mission and Authority; his Religion, we find, was so far from being immediately and universally received, that it met with great and violent Opposition both from

from Jew and Gentile. They were offended in him; they were possessed with several inveterate Prejudices against him and his Religion, which it was not easy to root out. Some Things there were both in the Condition and Doctrine of our blessed Saviour, at which they were so violently disgusted; at which they took so much Offence, that they were Proof against every thing which could be offered in his Favour. These were the Obstructions to the immediate and universal spreading of Christianity over the whole Earth; for both Jews and Gentiles had their peculiar Prejudices: And what those Prejudices were, and the Unreasonableness of them, it is the Design of this Discourse to shew you.

And First. For the Jewish Prejudices.

One great Matter which prejudiced the Jews against our blessed Saviour and his Doctrine was this — That they looked upon him as coming with a Design to abolish the Law of *Moses*, and to set up his own Religion in the room of it. The Mosaic Law they knew was the Law of God; and a Law, which, from several Passages in the Body of it, they concluded was to continue in Force
for

for ever; they could not therefore be easily persuaded to submit to any Person, who seemed to abrogate and set aside this Law.

This Objection we find them often warmly and expressly urging. Thus their Charge against St. *Stephen* was, that he had spoken blasphemous Words against *Moses* and against God; against the holy Place and the Law; and that he had said, that Jesus of *Nazareth* should destroy this Place, (*i. e.*) their City and Temple; and change the Customs which *Moses* delivered them. And the Cry against St. *Paul* was, that he was the Man, who taught all Men every where against the People and the Law, and this Place. Nay, so tenacious were the Jews of their old Rites and Ceremonies, that they could not be persuaded to part with them, even upon their Conversion to Christianity: For we read, that there were many Thousands of Jews who believed, who were yet all zealous of the Law. And they took no little Offence at St. *Paul's* Conduct in teaching all the Jews, whom he found dispersed among the Gentiles, to forsake *Moses*, and not to walk after the Customs. And to take off this Odium,

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was the Design of that Advice which was given him, to purify himself in the Temple. Such was the Jewish Fondness for their old Religion; such, that even those who submitted to the Authority of Christ, could not be persuaded, even by virtue of that Authority, to relinquish it: They were contented to graft the new Religion upon it, but could not think of giving it up: They endeavoured therefore to reconcile the two Dispensations together, and to obey at once the Laws both of *Moses* and Christ; and indeed long was it before this judaizing Temper wore off, and many were the Controversies and Contentions it occasioned in the Church.

Let us examine now into the Reasonableness of this Objection. \ It was a Maxim among themselves, that a Prophet could dispense with the ritual and ceremonial Part of the Law; the Reason of which must be this: That a Prophet being a Person charged with a divine Commission, he had the same Right to dispense with the Law, that *Moses* had at first to enact it. In this Case it is the same Power which dispenses with the Laws, that at first made them; and there is no Man
will

will dispute, but that every Lawgiver may dispense with his own Laws as he sees proper.

Now for the same Reason that the Authority which enacts any Laws, may dispense with them, it may abrogate them likewise. Dispensation is a temporary Abolition; it is a suspending of the Obligation of the Laws: And this no Power can be supposed to do, but what can abolish them likewise if it pleases.

If therefore it be allowed, that a Prophet may dispense with the Law of *Moses*, because he acts by a divine Commission; it must for the same Reason be allowed, that he may utterly abolish it likewise: For as no Authority but the divine, can either dispense with or abrogate any divine Law, so that Authority (and it is with that the Prophet is invested) may do either.

If therefore the Jews pursued this their own Maxim through its just Consequences, they could not but acknowledge, that whoever can dispense with a Law may abrogate it likewise; and that therefore, if our blessed Saviour produced as good Credentials of his divine Mission and Authority, as *Moses* did
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of his, he has the same Power to abolish the Law, that *Moses* had to enact it.

But can the divine Law be changed? The Reasonableness of dispensing with it in some particular Circumstances may indeed easily be conceived; and therefore a dispensing Power may be delegated to a Prophet; but that the divine Laws should be totally changed, seems not so consistent with the divine Perfections; and therefore this is a Power which cannot be supposed to be lodged in any Prophet: For does not a Change of the divine Laws make the Almighty contradict himself? Is it not an Impeachment of his Wisdom and of his Immutability? No; nothing of all this: There is no sort of Self-contradiction in making one Dispensation to succeed another. To design a Law for perpetual Continuance, and then immediately to enact another in direct Opposition to it, without any Reason or Necessity, is indeed Imperfection and Contradiction; but to appoint several Systems of Laws, each to take Place in its proper Turn, has not so much as the Appearance of Contradiction.

Neither is a Change of the Law at all inconsistent, either with the divine Wisdom

or

or Immutability. A Change of the divine Law does by no means imply a Change of Mind in the Deity: No; the Foundation of the Change of the Law is the Change of their Circumstances for whom the Law was designed. Man is a weak, infirm, variable Creature, and therefore cannot always be dealt with in the same Manner. The Regimen must alter as the Distemper does: Laws, the most congruous to some Persons, in some Circumstances, may be to others, or to the same Persons in different Circumstances, the most unsuitable that can be imagined. Change of Laws is founded on the Change of Condition in the Subject; and therefore it cannot be supposed but the divine Laws must undergo several Alterations, unless the Creature were as immutable as its Creator.

No Legislature is accused of a fickle and variable Humour for changing its Statutes, according to the Change of Circumstances in the Subjects. No; 'tis applauded as the highest Wisdom: Indeed the contrary Conduct would be censured, and justly too, as an obstinate Adherence to its first Determinations, notwithstanding the manifest Necessity of altering them.

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The Imperfection of a mutable Temper consists in this, that it changes arbitrarily and capriciously without any Reason or Foundation; but to change upon Reason and Necessity is consistent with the greatest Immutability, if it be considered as a rational Perfection, for otherwise it is Fatality. When therefore the Almighty changes his Dispensations according to the Exigencies of his Creatures, we cannot but admire his Wisdom; and as for his Immutability, it is not He, but his Creature that is changed. And this Change in the divine Oeconomy, upon our Change of Circumstance, is an Effect and Proof of the divine Immutability: For this is to pursue his first, his original, his immutable Design, which was to consult the Good and Happiness of his Creatures in all their different Exigencies and Necessities: And this Conduct at once demonstrates both the Perfection and Harmony of his Attributes.

Now this Way of Reasoning will give a clear Account of the Fitness and even Necessity of exchanging the Mosaick Law for the Christian. The Jewish Law, as is clear from several of its Precepts, (particularly
from

from that one which obliged all the Males personally to appear three Times a Year before the Lord in *Jerusalem*) was never designed to extend to all Mankind. It was formed for that peculiar People to whom it was given; suited to their particular Circumstance; and so contrived as to answer the great Ends which Providence intended to bring about, by thus selecting one People out of all the Nations of the Earth. Now the two great Ends which the Almighty appears to have had in View, by chusing a peculiar People, and giving that People a peculiar Law, were these; to preserve the Worship of the true God from being absolutely and entirely lost, and to typify and pre-figure the great Sacrifice of the Messiah.

Now these Ends being once answered, the Law falls of Course; its original Design being obtained, the Reason of it ceases. The idolatrous Customs of the World, which many of the ceremonial Laws were designed to guard against, being now abolished, and the Knowledge of the true God more universally spread, there is no longer any Use in that Part of the Law: And the Messiah being

now come and actually sacrificed for us, there is no Fitness nor Congruity in observing the typical Part.

The Law therefore cannot so properly be said to be abolished, as to expire of itself; and our Saviour has not destroyed, but fulfilled it. By extirpating Idolatry, he has rendered useless all those Ceremonies which were to guard against it; and by coming and dying for us, he has fulfilled all those that were figurative of himself. He has given to this Part of the Law that Completion, which alone can account for its Institution. And as for the moral Commands, instead of taking any thing from them, he has added to them, and improved them. He has now raised them to their original Perfection; a Perfection which the sensual People to whom he first gave them, were not capable of bearing. All this the Jews would have easily perceived, would their Prejudices have permitted them to reflect. They would soon have discerned that Christianity was the Substance, which was shadowed out in the Rites and Ceremonies of the Law: The *Life* from which the Picture of Judaism was taken.

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They would have seen that it was not properly a *new* Religion, but only the Opening and full Discovery of the one only true Religion: For in Fact, Judaism and every other Dispensation were only Christianity revealed in different Degrees. They were indeed accompanied with peculiar Circumstances, suited to the then Condition of Mankind; but still they all pointed one Way; had the same Meaning, Ground-work, and Foundation; and that was *the Sacrifice of the Redeemer*.

Thus the Reasonableness of exchanging the mosaick for the christian Law, appears from the different Circumstances and Situation Mankind is at present in, from what it was when the Mosaick Law was delivered. As to those Passages in the Law itself, which seem to imply its Continuance for ever; it is well known, that the Word which we render *for ever*, does not always signify an everlasting Continuance, in a strict and proper Sense. This is plain from many Passages, but particularly from that where the Servant, who is said to serve his Master for ever, is yet to be discharged in the Year of Jubilee.

It is well known that all the Laws of

Moses were not designed to be of equal Continuance. Some were to be in Force only while the People sojourned in the Wilderness; others were not thus temporary, but were to be constant standing Laws. When therefore it is said, that such a Law shall be observed throughout their Generations for ever; the Meaning of it is no more than this, that it shall continue to be observed, as long as the Jewish Dispensation shall subsist.

Again. The Jews were offended at our blessed Saviour upon the account of the Meanness of his Life, and the Ignominy of his Death. The Notion under which the Jews had promised to themselves their Messiah, was that of a great and mighty temporal Prince, sitting literally upon the Throne of *David*, and restoring again the Kingdom to *Israel*, by making them trample upon and triumph over all their Enemies, and by reducing the whole Gentile World under their Obedience. Possessed with this Notion of a Messiah, it was no wonder indeed they could not easily be brought to acknowledge as such, the reputed Son of a Carpenter. *Joseph*, it is true, and *Mary*, were both of the Royal Family of *David*, but there were
other

other Branches of that House, living in their proper Dignity and Splendor, among whom surely it was more likely to find the King Messiah, than among those, who by the Meanness and Contemptibleness of their Condition, seemed rather to be cast off by Heaven, than designed for such an Honour. What! Shall the promised Messiah be laid in a Manger; shall he be educated by an inferior Tradesman? Shall he wander about the Country, depending upon the Charity and Benevolence of others for his Subsistence, and not even have where to lay his Head? And instead of the pompous Train of a Prince, shall his Attendants be only a few contemptible Fishermen? And to fill up the Measure of his Miseries, shall he at last be executed as one of the vilest Malefactors? Is this becoming the Messiah? Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ abideth for ever, how then can he die? That he shall be a King that shall reign and prosper, How then does the pitiable Condition of Jesus of *Nazareth* answer this Character?

Thus may we suppose a worldly-minded Jew, full of the Grandeur and Magnificence of the Messiah, to argue against the meek

and humble Jesus. But surely did they honestly consult those Scriptures they would appear to make such Use of, they would see the Meanness, and Misery, and Death of the Messiah, painted out in as strong and lively Colours as his Royalty and Grandeur. One would think they had forgot the 53d Chapter of *Isaiah*, which is no other than a long Catalogue of his Miseries: But it is the Misfortune of Mankind, to overlook what they dislike,

However, upon the Foot of Reason, which is the properest Condition for the Messiah? an humble and lowly, or a royal and prosperous one; If we consider the End and Design of his coming into the World, we cannot help thinking but that an humble and lowly one, was upon all Accounts most suitable. The Design of his coming was, to reform the World, and to introduce an Institution of the most consummate Goodness. He came to call us off from the Pleasures of Sense, and to teach us the difficult Lessons of Mortification and Self-denial. But with what Propriety would these Doctrines have come from a great and conquering King? With what Grace would Poverty have been recommended

recommended by him who chose to abound in this World's Goods? Or Submission and Humility by an universal Monarch? It is the peculiar Advantage of us Christians, that we have the Example, as well as the Precepts of our Master. He went before us in every Instance of Virtue he enjoins us; which, had he assumed the other Character, would have been impossible; for then we would have lost, what the greater Part of Men are concerned in, *The Example of his Sufferings*.

As to the Death of the Messiah this was the first and principal Design of all; for by this he became a Sacrifice for Sin. And the Ignominy and Cruelty of his Death, made him still the brighter Example of Patience and Resignation.

There is another Advantage in the low Estate and Death of our Saviour, that they are a full Demonstration of the Truth of his Religion. Had he endeavoured at temporal Prosperity, and at making himself a King, his Truth and Sincerity might reasonably have been questioned; for temporal Views always create Suspicion: But for a Person patiently to submit to the most afflicting

Condition of Life, and to the most painful and ignominious Death too, in Defence of what he asserts, is an irresistible Proof of his Sincerity.

Having been thus particular in these two capital Prejudices against Christianity, the Time will not permit me to proceed to others, which therefore must be reserved for the Subject of another Discourse.



SERMON



S E R M O N IV.

Of the Offences taken against Christianity.



St. MATTHEW xi. 6.

*And blessed is he whosoever shall not
be offended in me.*

N a former Discourse on these Words, I observed, that on the first Appearance of Christianity, many were the Objections that were raised to it; that many were the Prejudices against it; that there were several Particulars both in the Doctrine and Condition of our blessed Saviour, which

which gave Offence both to Jew and Gentile, And what those Prejudices were, and the Unreasonableness of them, was what I then proposed to lay before you.

Of the Jewish Prejudices I then mentioned two: — The Abolition of the Law of *Moses* — and the Meanness of the Condition, and Ignominy of the Death, of our blessed Saviour.

As to the first, the Abolition of the Law of *Moses*. It is evident both from Scripture and Reason, that that Law was never intended for perpetual Continuance; by no means designed to remain in Force to the End of the World.

It was contrived for a peculiar People, — for peculiar Purposes — and for a peculiar Season.

For a peculiar People — The Descendants of one Man — The Inhabitants of a very small Country — a Nation, with respect to Mankind, very inconsiderable. For these the Law was so immediately designed, that it was in itself utterly impracticable by the rest of the World, should they become convinced of its divine Authority, and consequently disposed to embrace it. For the Law, under the

the severest Penalties, confined all Sacrifices to the Temple at *Jerusalem*; and under the like Penalties obliged all the Males to appear personally there, three Times a Year before the Lord. With neither of which Commands will it, I presume, be thought possible for the whole Race of Mankind to comply.

Judaism therefore, from the Nature and Constitution of it, cannot be the universal Religion; and from thence we may fairly conclude, that it cannot be the perpetual Religion neither; unless we suppose that God had thrown off the whole World but the Jews, and never intended any Favours of this Kind for them; A Supposition, as shall be shewn, manifestly contrary both to Reason and Scripture.

It was designed also for peculiar Purposes. — Those Purposes were, first, to preserve the Knowledge and Worship of the true God, from being utterly and absolutely lost; with them they were a Deposit, hereafter to be dispersed for general Use: A Reserve of sacred Fire, in due Time to blaze out, and enlighten all the Ends of the Earth. And secondly, to typify and prefigure the great Sacrifice of Messiah. Now these Ends being
both

both answered by Christianity, the Intention of the Law of *Moses* is answered, and has now therefore no longer any Foundation in Reason and Nature. The Knowledge and Worship of the true God being now revived and propagated in the World — and the great Sacrifice of Messiah being actually offered, the Law having nothing more to do, expires of itself.

It was designed also for a *peculiar Season*; even for the Times of Darkness and Ignorance; till the Fulness of Time should come: Till that happy Period, when the divine Purposes being ripe for Execution, he should send forth his Son to bring Life and Immortality to Light. Nor will it be sufficient to reply to this, that there are many Passages in the Law itself, implying its Continuance to the End of the World. For it is well known that the Laws of *Moses*, with respect to the Time they were to remain in Force, were of two Kinds; some only temporary and transient, designed for a particular Time and Situation, as for Instance, for their Stay in the Wilderness. And others were designed to be standing and perpetual Laws, *i. e.* to be in Force, not to the End of

of the World, but as long as their Religion and Polity subsisted. And this is all that is meant, when it is said, that such or such an Ordinance shall be observed in their Generations for ever.

But were the Reasons for the Cessation of the Jewish Law not so obvious, yet should the Jews have acknowledged our Saviour's Right to abrogate it; for by their own Maxims, a Prophet might dispense with the Law; and no Power can dispense, but what may abrogate. If therefore our Lord produced as good Credentials of his divine Mission, as *Moses* had done of his, he had the same Right to abolish the Law, that *Moses* had to establish it.

Nor does the divine Immutability forbid it; for it is not the Creator but the Creature that is changed. And to appoint several Systems of Laws to succeed each other, according to the Exigencies of the Subject, is in no sort inconsistent with the highest Immutability, if considered as a rational Perfection.

Another Jewish Objection was the mean Life and the ignominious Death of our Saviour.

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As to the former, that was also agreeable to Scripture — It was likewise the fittest Character for a Reformer of the World ; as it added *Weight of Example to Excellence of Precept.*

It was, besides, the Condition freest from Suspicion of temporal Views, and therefore the likeliest to make Impression.

And as to his Death : That was the grand Affair of all. The first and principal Intention of his appearing ;

And the Ignominy and Severity of the Manner of it, contributed at once to raise and heighten both the *Example of his Resignation* and the *Proof of his Sincerity.*

Another Jewish Prejudice against Christianity, to which I now proceed, is this : That they found this Religion was designed to destroy the Distinction between Jew and Gentile ; to break down the Partition-wall, and to admit all the Sons of *Adam* into equal Privileges with the Sons of *Abraham.* That they could not bear this Thought, appears by their Behaviour upon St. *Paul's* Vindication of himself : They listened quietly to his Defence, till he mentioned his Commission to the Gentiles, but then they were instantly
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in a Tumult; for they gave him Audience, says the sacred Historian, until this one Word, and then lift up their Voices, crying, Away with such a Fellow from the Earth, for it is not fit that he should live.

The Jews had been a long Time the peculiar People of God. They were a royal Priesthood; an holy Nation: They had long been honoured with great and distinguishing Favours from Heaven: To them pertained the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the Service of God and the Promises; theirs were the Fathers, and above all, of them as concerning the Flesh was the Messiah to come. Now these peculiar Honours had elated the Jews, and made them think exceeding highly of themselves, and meanly and contemptibly of all the rest of Mankind. These Privileges they thought made so great a Difference, (and a great one most certainly they did make) between them and other Nations, that they looked upon them as unworthy of their Regard.

Being therefore long used to this way of thinking, they could not endure the Thoughts of admitting the despised and hateful Gentiles
into

into a Share of their Privileges and Favours. They could not give up their beloved, their boasted Distinction; nor endure that they who had been so long shut out, should now at last be adopted into the Family of God, and be made Joint-Heirs of the Promises with them. This was a grating Reflection, and such a one, as was of itself sufficient to prejudice that proud and haughty People against Christianity.

But had they consulted the Scriptures, they might have seen, that God intended to destroy the Distinction, and to admit the Gentiles into equal Privileges with the Jews; and likewise that he intended to do this by the Means of the Messiah. The Prophets are full of this Calling in of the Gentiles: In them the Messiah is said to be set for a Light of the Gentiles, that he may be for Salvation unto the Ends of the Earth. He is called an Ensign to the People, and a Standard to the Nations, and all Nations are said to flow unto him; and numberless other Passages are there to the same Purpose.

From Scripture therefore the Jews had no Cause to believe, that the Distinction between them and the Gentiles was to continue for
ever;

ever; and they had as little Ground from Reason as from Scripture to believe it. For why should they believe, that the gracious and beneficent Creator had absolutely cast off all the Race of *Adam*, but themselves, the Inhabitants of a little inconsiderable Spot of Earth? For is he the God of the Jews only, and not also of the Gentiles? Yes; of the Gentiles also. Had they had right Apprehensions of the divine Dispensation, they would have known that the Messiah was designed, not for a particular Favour to them; but for an universal Blessing to all Mankind. It was indeed their glorious Privilege to have him come of their Nation; but their Nation was not, for that Reason, to engross all the Benefit of him.

The great Design of the Almighty is, the universal Good of his Creatures; and it was this Concern for the Good of all, that seems to have given Rise to the particular Privileges of a few. That these few were the Seed of *Abraham*, was the Reward of the Faith of *Abraham*; but the Intention of separating any one Nation from the rest, seems to have been to secure that one, from the general Corruption; and to preserve in it the Worship

of the true God, when it was lost every where else: That so by this Means, the World might be again recovered and reformed. It is then the peculiar Honour of the Jews to have been the Guardians of true Religion, for the universal Good of Mankind: To them indeed were committed the Oracles of God; but not for *their own Sakes* only, but for *ours* also.

These were some of the principal Prejudices of the Jews against Christianity: The Gentiles likewise had theirs; and some of these I come next to consider, and I shall but just touch upon them, as being much less considerable.

And First. The Gentiles were offended at Christianity, upon the account of its Origin. The Rise of Christianity was in *Judea*, and its Author was a Jew. Now the Gentiles were in their Turn even with the Jews with regard to Contempt; for they treated them with peculiar Scorn and Derision: They looked upon the Jews as an odd and extraordinary People, contemptible in themselves, and yet treating every other Nation in a haughty and supercilious Manner. They therefore were immoderately prejudiced against
every

every thing which came from that Quarter. They thought too meanly both of *Judea* and of its Inhabitants, to imagine that the Saviour of the World should be a Jew, or that the principal Scene of his Action should be *Judea*; for should that mean and contemptible People instruct their Superiors? their Superiors both in Wisdom and Power; This is what they could not easily conceive, but yet it is an Objection too absurd to require an Answer.

Again; the Gentiles objected to Christianity, the Novelty of its Institution; but had they been well acquainted with the Nature of the Institution itself, this Objection would soon have vanished; for the Christian Scheme was not new: It was as old as the Reason and Necessity of it, even as old as the *Fall*; and they who would fix it to any other Era, whether earlier or later, equally conspire to sap its Foundation. This new Covenant was entered into immediately upon the Breach of the former. Christ our Passover was instantly sacrificed for us, in the Counsel and Fore-knowledge of God; and therefore the Benefits of that Sacrifice instantly took place: And for this Reason it is, that our

Saviour is called the Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World. The actual Offering of this Sacrifice, and the Publication of true Religion consequent upon it, were indeed deferred till *these last Days*, till that *Fulness of Time*, which, to infinite Wisdom and Goodness, seemed most expedient.

Again; the Gentiles were offended at the ignominious Death of our Saviour; for, What! Shall we worship him as a God, who was crucified as a Malefactor? This was often objected to the Christians, who were looked upon as the most absurd and monstrous of Wretches, for owning a crucified Master; for adoring him for a God, who had been put to Death like the vilest of Men. But this grievous Offence; this Offence of the Cross had quickly ceased, had they given themselves the Trouble coolly and without Prejudice, to examine into the glorious Ends which this cruel and ignominious Death was to bring about.

Another Offence to the Gentiles was the Meanness and Illiterateness of the first Teachers of Christianity; and the plain, simple, unaffected Manner in which they taught it. Philosophy was then in great Reputation;

Reputation; nothing therefore could be well received, but what was set off with all the Pomp of human Eloquence and Learning. The Greeks sought after Wisdom; they were fond of curious and philosophical Inquiries; and of the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom. But all these the first Preachers of Christianity disclaimed; they taught the great Truths of their Religion, not in a pompous and abstruse Manner, but with that Plainness and unaffected Simplicity, which was both the clearest Proof of their own Honesty, and the likeliest Method of reforming the World. Christianity they knew was not to be confined to the Philosopher only: No; all Mankind was concerned in it; and therefore they taught it in such a Manner, that all Mankind might understand it.

But such Plainness was below the Regard of the haughty Sophist. *Lettered Pride* could not endure to be thus taught; and therefore it was, that not many wise Men after the Flesh were called. Where is the wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? Christianity was not quickly relished by these; No; they were

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the meek, the modest, the sincere Inquirers after Truth, that were the first Converts.

Now this Method of propagating Christianity was designed to confound this learned Pride; a Company of illiterate Fishermen was to conquer all the Schools of Philosophy, on purpose to destroy the Wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nothing the Understanding of the prudent; and to prove likewise the Excellence and Divinity of Christianity, which was to make its Way unassisted by any human Arts, merely by its own native Force; which was to conquer the World, not by the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but by the Demonstration of the Spirit.

Thus have I shewn you some of the peculiar Prejudices both of Jew and Gentile against Christianity; but there is one more, with which I shall conclude, which was common to them both: The great and common Offence was the Purity of its Precepts; this was at the Bottom of all; this was what gave Strength and Vigour to all the other Offences: Had it not been for this, the Jew would have soon perceived the Reasonableness
of

of abrogating the Law, of the Sufferings of the Messiah, and of the calling in of the Gentiles; and had it not been for this, the Gentile Prejudices, concerning the Origin and Novelty of Christianity, concerning the Death of its Author, and the Simplicity of its Teachers, would soon have worn off. It was an evil Heart that was the true Cause of their Unbelief: It was this Root of Bitterness, which, springing up, choaked the Word, and rendered it unfruitful. For were Men honest and sincere Inquirers, and true and hearty Friends to that Sublimity of Virtue which our blessed Saviour enjoins, it is impossible they should be offended in him.

So it should seem indeed; for, What!

Shall we be offended at the Removal of a carnal and grievous Law, and the Substitution of a light and spiritual one in the room of it? Shall we complain of being made easy?

Shall we be offended at Condescension, at Condescension for our Sakes? At Manhood, and Meanness, and Misery undergone for us Men, and for our Salvation?—And shall we be displeased, that the Son of God loved us so well, as even to die for us?

Shall we be offended that he has destroyed all envied Distinctions; and with equal and impartial Eye regards his whole Creation — willing and inviting all Men to be saved?

Shall we be offended that the great Messiah was according to the Flesh of Jewish Extract? What can be freer than Favours? Or shall we be offended, that he was the Descendant of Persons renowned for Piety; pronounced by God himself well-pleasing in his Sight? The Descendant in particular of *Abraham*, the Heir of the World, as the Apostle calls him: The foremost in the List of the faithful and obedient; the most shining Character of all Antiquity.

Shall we be offended at the seeming Novelty of the Gospel? Alas! Let us not think that we alone have the Benefit of the Redeemer. Vain Imagination! However, surely we need not be angry at our being more highly favoured with a fuller Discovery of him.

Shall we be offended that the Messiah died, was buried, and went down into Hell; or at any Circumstances of Infamy and Ignominy attending them, when we recollect, that he
rose

rose again, ascended into Heaven, and now sitteth enthroned, even in that very Manhood which he wore here, at the Right Hand of the Majesty of God?

Shall we be offended at the Mortification of human Learning and of human Vanity? At God's resisting the proud, and giving Grace to the humble? Or shall we be offended at God's magnifying his own Power and Glory in the Weakness of the Instruments he employs?

And lastly. Shall we be offended at the Purity and Holiness of the Gospel-Precepts? This, however deeply rooted in our Hearts, we will not surely dare to avow; for this is to be offended at Virtue and Goodness, at Righteousness and Godliness.

Blessed then is he, whosoever shall not be offended at these Things.

Blessed is he, who shall thankfully and gladly put on the easy Yoke of the Gospel, instead of the galling one of the Law.

Blessed is he, whose Covetousness and Ambition shall not make him reject a meek and lowly Saviour — nor his overweening and presumptuous Soul, a dying one.

Blessed

Blessed is he, whose Consciousness of his own Unworthiness disposes him not to repine at the seemingly partial Dispensation of divine Favours, but gratefully to rejoice whensoever he is admitted to be Sharer in them.

Blessed is he, who is content to receive the Blessings of God in God's own Way; without presuming to quarrel at the Method of Conveyance.

Blessed is he, who joyfully embraces divine Offers, whenever they are proposed; and spurns not at them, till he be first satisfied why they were not made him sooner.

Blessed is he, who, instead of stumbling at the Cross, chearfully takes it up, and bears it after the great Captain of his Salvation.

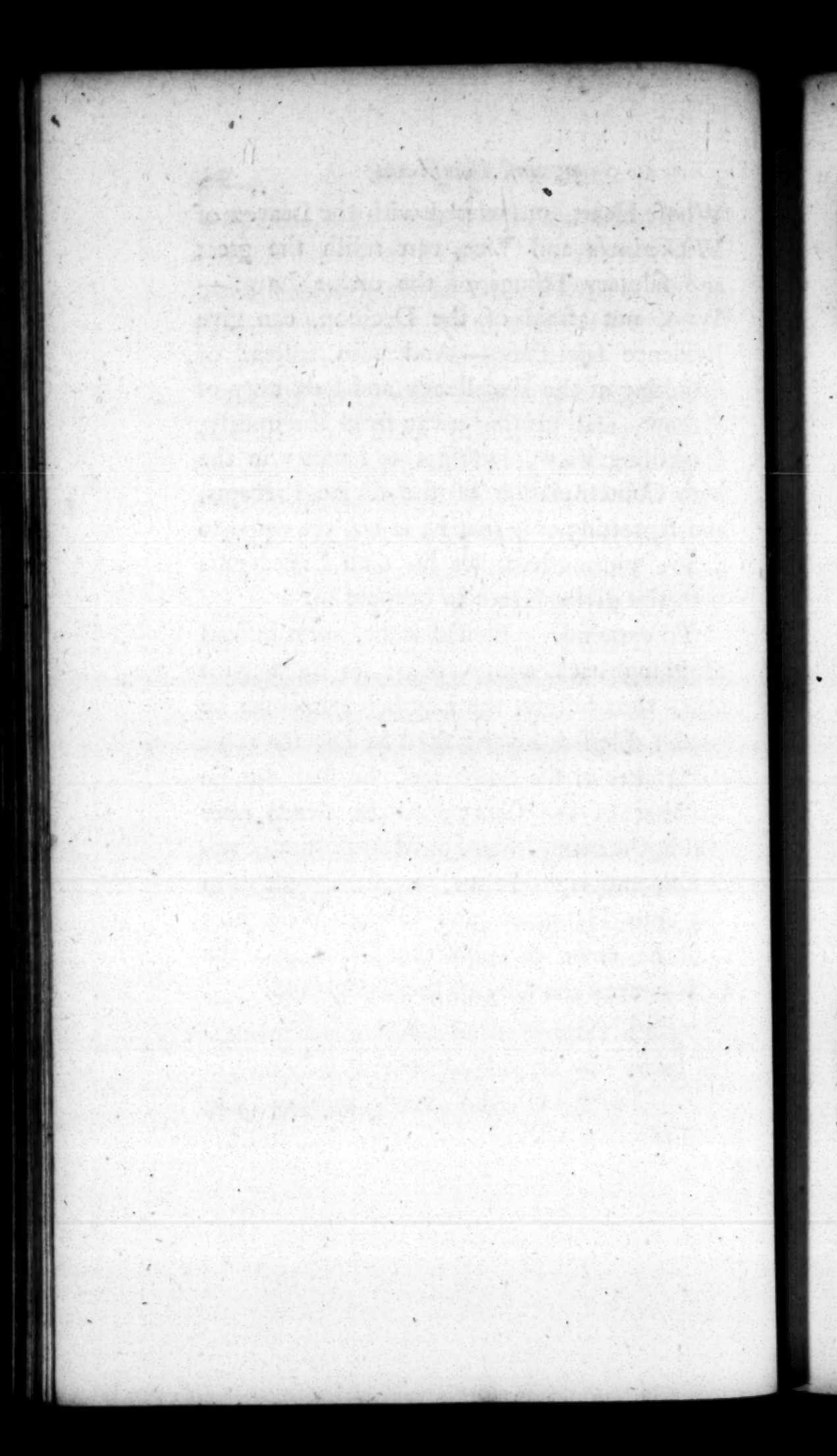
Blessed is he, whose imaginary Wisdom will stoop to be informed by true and real Wisdom, how plain and unaffected soever is her Dress — and who, instead of disdaining the natural Contemptibleness of the Means made use of, will admire and adore the Efficacy of divine Grace in the Success of them.

Blessed is he, whose honest and unbiaſſed Soul will let Truth have her free Course :
Whose

Whose Heart, unfower'd with the Leaven of Wickedness and Vice, can relish the great and salutary Things of the divine Law: — Who, not afraid of the Decision, can give Evidence fair Play — And who, instead of shrinking at the Excellency and Sublimity of Precept, and turning away from the uneasy, the killing View, indulges to Luxury in the high Contemplation of the divine Precepts, and regretting only that he is not yet equal to them; gloriously unites his own Endeavours with the divine Grace to become so.

To conclude. Blessed is he, who instead of going back and walking no more with him, thus follows the Lamb wheresoever he goeth: Blessed indeed shall he be, for as he is Partaker of the Sufferings, he shall also be Partaker of the Glory: As he treads after him in the painful Steps of Mortification, Self-denial, and rigid Virtue, he shall trace him also into Happiness and Glory: With him shall he enter through the Gates into the City — even the City of the living God.

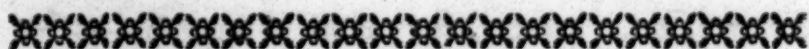
S E R M O N





S E R M O N V.

Of the Manner of the Propagation of the Gospel, and its Uses.



St. MARK xvi. 20.

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.



THESE Words are a summary Account of the Acts of the Apostles and first Followers of our Lord, in the great Work of converting the World to the Christian Faith:
His

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His own personal Ministry here on Earth, being concluded by his Ascent into Heaven, his Disciples succeed to the Charge, and go forth and preach every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.

In this Account of the Manner of the Propagation of Christianity, there are several Things highly worthy of Observation. And it shall be the Business of the following Discourse to point them out, with their Uses.

The first Thing observable is, that the Undertaking was in consequence of a *special Commission*, given for that Purpose. — He said unto them, Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every Creature — and they went forth and preached every where. So also St. *Matthew*; Go ye therefore and teach, or make Disciples to me of all Nations, baptizing them.

This sending or commissioning of the first Preachers of Christianity, is a Thing often mentioned and urged in the Holy Scriptures. A Commission is indeed so necessary in the Nature of it, that our blessed Lord himself thinks fit even to insist upon his: In his Discourses with the Jews, making frequent
Mention

Mention of it, and as it were pleading it in his Behalf — The Father hath sent me — I came not of myself, but he sent me.

And if a Commission was proper and necessary in our blessed Saviour himself, it must be still much more so to his Inferiors, his Disciples and Followers; for how could they be supposed to preach except they were sent? How indeed, unless the Lord God and his Spirit had sent them? Therefore we find our Lord expressly commissioning his Disciples — As my Father hath sent me, so send I you — And this was necessary for them, with regard both to God and Man. With regard to *God* it was necessary for them, because without it, their Undertaking would have been *presumptuous*; and with regard to *Man*, because without it, they had wanted *Authority*.

I have not sent these Prophets, yet they run, was said by God of several in the Days of *Jeremiah*, who officiously and impiously took upon them to prophesy without Warrant and Commission. And indeed nothing can well be supposed either more vain and absurd or more presumptuous and prophane; for surely Heaven is very nearly concerned to blast and defeat every Project carried on in
its

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its *Name*, without its *Authority*: And to avenge too its injured Honour on the Projectors; since there can be no greater Prostitution of its Name, than to say, the Lord saith, when the Lord hath not sent us.

It is not enough to say, that the Doctrine they undertook to spread was noble and excellent, and *worthy of God to deliver*, and *useful for Man to receive*: This will not make the propagating it a divine Act, nor vindicate the Propagators in claiming a divine Authority; for though it be true, that nothing but what is good can come from Heaven, yet it does not follow, that every thing which is good does therefore come from thence by special Direction and Commission.

Neither would the private Belief of the Apostles in their Master, as Prophet or Messiah, bear them out in this Matter. Though they received him in the Character of God most High, yet even *that* would not permit them to use his *Authority* without his *Command*.

And with regard to Mankind, if this *Authority* could not have been used; if a divine Commission could not have been urged, the preaching of Christianity would have been
without

without Effect or Influence; without, at least, that Weight of Authority, which overbore the World. Without this, the first Preachers would have been upon no different Foot from the Philosophers and Moralists of Old — Reasoning and arguing only as well as they could, in Defence of their Opinions, but not pronouncing and determining upon them; the recommending a Thing from its Reasonableness and Excellence, is a very different Thing from enforcing it by Authority: The former is *Advice* only, the latter is *Law*. The former leaves us at Liberty to be guided by our Interest, our Humour, or our Passion; leaves us at Liberty, we imagine, to judge upon it, and determine for ourselves; but *Authority* is irresistible and overbearing. And it was the Deficiency in this Point which rendered useless to the Business of Reformation, all the antient Lectures of Morality: And which, had they been absolutely perfect as to their Matter, would have continued them useless to the End of the World; for Men may entertain themselves with subtle Reasonings on the Nature of Virtue, and see what *sine Things* they please in it, but still nothing can *oblige*

them to it but Authority; for *Obligation* drawn from any other Source is Contradiction.

The Christian Commission then removes all Defects of this Nature, enforcing Obedience by the full and express Authority of God. Besides, the Christian Religion is not a System merely of Laws and Precepts, and Injunctions; it is also a Charter of Favours, and Privileges, and Blessings: And the Christian Commission is as necessary to *assure* us of the latter, as to *enforce* upon us the former: It authorises as well to *promise* as to *threaten*.

Now the Uses we should make of these Observations on the Commission given by our Lord to his Disciples, are these:

We should learn from them, First, — The absolute Necessity of Obedience: For the Commission and Authority are no less than *divine*; and therefore in no Sort to be dispensed with.

We should learn, Secondly, — The Necessity of an implicit and universal Obedience; for Divinity claims both: Claims them by its Wisdom and Authority. We must dispute neither *Obedience*, nor the *Reasonableness* of it,

it, in any Instance whatsoever. We must not pick and chuse among the Commandments of God, nor have any Regard to our own Likeing. Authority alone must be the *Foundation* and the *Rule* of our Obedience; and it will hold in *all* Cases, or in none.

If the Christian Religion be not, as it pretends, of divine Extraction, then I presume its Authority will be easily allowed to be *none at all*; and that Mankind are at Liberty to deal with it as with other human Institutions, *i. e.* take what they like, and reject the rest. But if on the contrary, it can produce a divine Commission, then surely no one will be hardy enough to affirm, that its Authority can either be *limited* or *controlled*.

We should learn, Thirdly, — To bear up with Chearfulness under any Persecution or ill Treatment for the christian Cause, or any Tribulation in our christian Course: Since eternal Truth stands engaged to make good the Promises of its Commissioners.

Hence appears the Impropriety, the *Impiety* rather, of those who act without any Commission. This let those consider, who wantonly depart from the regular Method of

H 2 Conveyance;

Conveyance; — and they also who invade the ministerial Office, without so much as the Appearance of any Commission at all.

Lastly. We may learn the Prophaneness of pretending a divine Commission, where there is none. This let those extravagant Enthusiasts consider, who arrogate to themselves extraordinary Authority and Commission from on high; who are ever talking of heavenly Impulse, Emotion, and Illumination; who claim Inspiration in the very same Sense as the Apostles; and presume to vent their Blasphemies and Impieties in the tremendous Name of the Holy Ghost.

The next Degree of Prophaneness to this (and which is common to all Enthusiasts) is the affecting to talk in an apostolick Strain: The using and applying to themselves with great Freedom and Familiarity, and with mighty apparent Sanctity, the Phrase and Language not only of the Apostles, but even of our blessed Saviour himself. This, though not the express claiming of an extraordinary Commission, is very near a-kin to it; for it is a kind of Insinuation of it: It is the using the Speech of those who actually had it, and which alone gave Propriety to it even in them:

them : — Scripture-Language is, by all sober Persons, ever made use of with great Awe, Caution, and Moderation ; and not applied even to those who have a divine Commission, the Successors of the first Ministers of the Gospel, but in a Sense qualified and restrained.

For every common Christian, therefore, to speak like an Apostle, is to profane their Language by Misapplication. It is to assume their Character, to usurp their Authority ; 'tis Arrogance and Imposition ; Imposition on the weak and ignorant, deluded with fair Speeches ; and the highest Pitch of Arrogance and spiritual Pride, as insinuating a Resemblance, a Likeness between them and the Founders of our Faith : Of spiritual Pride, of all the Diseases of the Soul, the blackest and foulest, the most obstinate and inveterate. From Language therefore in them so unbecoming, so nauseous and offensive, will all serious and sensible People turn away not only with Contempt, but Abhorrence.

Secondly. Another Thing observable in this Account of the Manner of propagating Christianity, is the *Character of the Persons* to whom the Commission was given — they

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were not noble, great, rich, learned, politick, nor in any Sense powerful or considerable. On the contrary, they were ignoble, low, mean, poor, rude, ignorant, illiterate; and, in every worldly View, weak and contemptible. They had no Learning to convince, no Eloquence to persuade, no worldly Offers to corrupt; no vitious Indulgences to allure; no Force to intimidate. Naked and unarmed they set out upon the Conquest of the World; provided with nothing but what seemed calculated peculiarly to encrease the Difficulty, and heighten the Opposition.

Now an Use we should make of this Observation is, to be the more convinced and assured of the Divinity of the Christian Religion, which appears to have had no Dependence on human Aids and Assistances; which made its Way and triumphed over the World, not only without a Concurrence of favourable Circumstances, but with a Concurrence of the most opposite unfavourable ones; which owes nothing to the Arm of Flesh, but is thus manifestly the great Power of God; for in this Dispensation the Haughtiness of Man is brought down, and the Loftiness of Man is laid low.

Another

Another Use of this Observation is, to adore the Wisdom of divine Providence in this Dispensation, which is so wonderfully fitted to bring down the Haughtiness of Man, and to lay low his Loftiness. Herein does it appear, that the Foolishness of God is wiser than Men, and the Weakness of God is stronger than Men. By this, the Lord alone is exalted, and no Flesh can glory in his Presence; but on the contrary, all is silent and subdued before him.

But we should beware of from hence inferring, that because Christianity was at first propagated without human Learning or human Power, that therefore now, neither of them can be rightly employed in the Christian Cause. In the Beginning, every thing was supplied from above; Knowledge, and Strength, and every other Requisite were immediately sent down from the Giver of every good and perfect Gift: But the Case is not so now; Christianity, founded by divine Means alone, is to be supported by human Means in Conjunction with divine. Divine Means alone were at first used as a Display of the divine Power, and a Manifestation of the Divinity of the Institution; but human Means

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are now made necessary, as for many Reasons respecting the divine Providence, so very probably for one respecting us, which is, to give us an Opportunity of exercising our Care, and Zeal, and Industry; for surely we should not be wholly unactive about our Religion. Human Assistance is now therefore in no sort contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel. — The Care and Guardianship of Religion is both the highest Duty and the highest Honour of the Civil Magistrate — and human Learning is a Hand-maid to divine; subordinate indeed always, but at the same Time greatly useful and advantageous.

It is decried by Enthusiasts only who want it; and it is a Want so sensibly felt, and from a Liking to which they apprehend such fatal Consequences from their Followers, that they guard against the Blow, by representing it as destructive of, and dishonourable to, true Christianity.

We should learn from hence also, to beware of another Device of these same Enthusiasts, who, in all the Insolence of their Hearts, are ever insisting on their Meanness and Contemptibleness; insinuating a Likeness herein between them and the Apostles, who
in

in themselves were mean and contemptible also. An affected Imitation of the Apostles in this Point, has produced many Enthusiasts among the weaker and lower People. The Leaders of the Anabaptists in *Germany*, who occasioned so much Misery and Bloodshed, were mostly such; and were (if there was any thing earnest in them at all) infallibly persuaded that they were Apostles, for no other Reason but because they were Tradesmen. Tradesmen indeed they were, and the lowest of them too; but however at their first setting out they might in this resemble the Apostles, it was a Resemblance they soon grew weary of. Their Progress and Designs were not very apostolick; for they rioted in Debauchery, and fought for Empire.

Among our modern Enthusiasts too is this profane Comparison very frequent; for how often shall we hear them talk of the Meanness of the Instrument and of the Efficacy of Grace, which loves to work by, and be perfected through Weakness. Hypocrites! Who knows not that the Grace of God is all-powerful, and can be effectual when he pleases, however weak are the Means he chuses to operate by? And who knows not
too,

too, that in the Infancy of the Gospel, God actually did chuse the weak Things of this World to confound the mighty: And Things that were not, to bring to nought Things that were. Who, I say, knows not this? But then it should be remembered, that these weak Vessels were particularly chosen and appointed for this Purpose. These ignorant and illiterate Fishermen were selected from the rest of the World; sent with God's Message, and (however naturally unqualified) provided immediately and extraordinarily by God's *own Hand* with every thing necessary to the Discharge of it. Here is a Compensation for all Defects and Infirmities; God commissions them, and therefore, as was to be expected, God supplies them — And whenever a divine Commission can be produced, I believe no serious Christian will ever object to the Meanness of the Commissioners: But till it be, we cannot help pronouncing all such Comparisons as insolent and unworthy, and a high Indignity to the Apostles and first Preachers of the Gospel.

I would not by this, be thought to disapprove of private Rebuke and Exhortation among Christians of whatever Condition, be
they

they ever so mean and low. No; it is our Duty to study the Edification and Salvation of one another. But still all this may be done without any Allusion or Reference to, or Comparison with, the first Labourers in the Vineyard; which favours more of Pride and Ostentation, than of that Humility and Meekness which should ever be the Attendants on religious Correction and Instruction.

Thirdly. Another Thing observable in the Text is, the *Extent* of the Christian Commission. They went out, and preached every where: It was not confined to the Jews, or to any particular Nation or People, but was universal; offered to and designed for the whole Race of apostate *Adam*: And in that Light indeed was it always prophesied of in the Old Testament. Its Gates were to be open continually, they were not to be shut Day nor Night, that the Forces of the Gentiles might come unto it—It was to set up a Standard for the Nations, and all Nations were to flow unto it. It was to break down the Partition-wall between Jew and Gentile; to admit all the World into the Family of God: It was to rend the
separating

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separating Veil, and give free Entrance into the Holiest of all.

The Use we should make of this Observation is, to adore the universal Love and Goodness of God to his whole Creation, manifested in these general Offers of Grace and Salvation.

Another Use is, to take infinite Care lest by our Hardness and Impenitence these Offers be resisted, and the Reception of them prevented: And lest, being received, the invaluable Possession should be forfeited by Unprofitableness and Unfruitfulness.

A third Use is — to study to imitate this universal Goodness of the Deity, in the Universality of our Good-will and Charity to Mankind.

Another is — to overthrow the Opinions of those gloomy Enthusiasts who must needs limit and confine the Merits of the great christian Sacrifice; and by Predestination and secret Decree, cut out Multitudes from the Benefit of it. This Doctrine our natural Notions of Justice and Humanity confute; the known Attributes of God, even so far as discoverable by Reason, confute it too — And these

these general Terms made use of in the Text confirm the Confutation: They went out and preached every where; every where, *i.e.* to all Nations, as St. *Matthew* expresses it; and as St. *Mark*, in this Chapter, more particularly and very exactly to every Creature. Go ye into all the *World*, and preach the Gospel to *every Creature*: Go ye into all the Nations throughout the World, and preach the Gospel (not as they would have it to some of each of those Nations) but to every *Individual* of them. And indeed why should we suppose any Distinction among *Persons* more than among *Nations*. God is no Respector of either, all are alike the Work of his Hands, and consequently alike the Objects of his Love.

The Offers of Salvation are then plainly made to *all* Men; and to suppose these made in general, and yet some Particulars prevented to receive them by the same Power that makes them, is, when God is that Power, attended with such Consequences as are not to be repeated.

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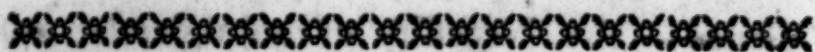
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S E R M O N VI.

Of the Manner of the Propagation of the Gospel, and its Uses.



St. MARK xvi. 20.

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.

 H E S E Words are a summary Account of the Manner of the Propagation of Christianity by the Apostles and immediate Followers of our Lord; and in them there are many Things highly

highly worthy of Observation. What they are, and the Uses of them, I proposed in a former Discourse to lay before you.

And the first Thing I then took Notice of was — That the Undertaking was in consequence of a special Commission, given for that Purpose. This I shewed was necessary, with regard both to God and Man; with regard to God, to save the first Preachers from Presumption and Prophaneness; with regard to Man, to give them Authority.

The Uses of this Observation were — to evince the indispensable Obligation of Obedience — the Necessity of an universal and unlimited Obedience — the Reasonableness of Ease and Chearfulness under any Tribulation in our christian Course — the Impiety of presuming to act as Commissioners without receiving any Commission — the Impiety also of pretending a divine Commission, where there is none — and the Prophaneness of what is very near a-kin to this, the affecting to use the Phrase and Language of such as are divinely commissioned.

A second Thing observable in the Text already taken Notice of is, the Character of the Persons to whom the Commission was given,

given; their Meanness and Contemptibleness, their Want of every Qualification, in a worldly View, requisite to Success; nay their being possessed of nothing but what in a natural Way tended signally to heighten the Difficulty, and even almost to force Disappointment.

The Uses of this Observation were shewn to be — to fix us the more in the Belief of the Gospel, which so remarkably made its Way by the visible Power and out-stretched Arm of God; not only without all human Assistance, but in Spite of all human Opposition — and to teach us to adore the divine Wisdom; in a Dispensation so admirably fitted to bring down the Haughtiness of Man; and to lay low his Loftiness; to humble us in our own Sight; and to exalt the Lord alone in our Hearts and Souls.

Here also was it shewed, that we should beware of a very pernicious Consequence drawn by Enthusiasts, from the Weakness and Illiterateness of the Apostles; that because Christianity was at first propagated without human Power or human Learning, that therefore now neither of these can be rightly employed in the christian Cause.

Here also was observed another profane and hypocritical Practice of these same Enthusiasts, who are ever comparing their own Meanness and Ignorance with that of the Apostles, and flatter themselves with the Dignity of the apostolick Character, because like the Apostles they are not book-learned, and are forced with them to work with their own Hands, for their Maintenance and Support.

A third observable was, the Extent of the christian Commission. It was not limited or confined to this or that People; Jew and Gentile were alike included; its glorious Designs and gracious Offers extended to the whole apostate Race of *Adam*; to all Nations and to every Individual of all Nations.

The Uses of this Observation were — to adore the universal Love and Goodness of God, thus so signally manifested and displayed in the Gospel of his Son — to take infinite Care, lest by our Hardness the Reception of these Offers be prevented; or, being received, their Benefit be forfeited by Unfruitfulness — to study to imitate the Universality of the divine Love by the Universality of our Goodwill and Charity to Mankind — and to
beware

beware of that desperate and gloomy Doctrine of Enthusiasm, which, contrary to our natural Notions of Good and Evil; contrary to our natural Conception of the Deity and his Attributes; contrary to the whole Current of Scripture, as well as to the Text, limit and restrain the Merits of the Lamb of God, that taketh away the Sins of the World: Cutting out by Predestination and secret Decree Multitudes, indeed the far greater Part of Mankind, from the Benefit of it.

Having spoke to these largely before, I now proceed to other Things observable in the Passage of Scripture now before us. And a fourth is, the Zeal with which the Christian Commission was *executed*. This is expressed in the Phrase of going out and preaching every where. They conferred not with Flesh and Blood; they consulted not what Measures were agreeable to them, what would be most safe or most easy, but without Delay and without Debate set forward on the Work: Intent only on the Success of that, they instantly set their Hands to the Plough, and looked not back; undiverted were they by any Call or Motive whatsoever. In Pursuance of their Commission, and their Qua-

lification, by the Knowledge of the Language of all Nations, they travelled into all Nations; their Sound went out into all Lands, and their Words unto the Ends of the World: Nor Fatigue, nor Clime, nor Terror, nor Torment, could obstruct or retard their Progress: Death alone was the End, as it was the Crown of their Labours. When St. Paul enumerates the many Perils and Hardships he underwent in the Cause of the Gospel, he does but give a Catalogue of the Evils which were the constant Lot of the first christian Preachers; and by them we may judge how zealously their Hearts burned within them, when neither they, nor all the Torments Earth or Hell could devise, were able to make them throw up the Cause, or even so much as in the least to falter or give way.

Now the Use of this Observation is, to encourage and oblige all succeeding Preachers of the Gospel to be faithful, zealous, and persevering in the Discharge of the ministerial Office: To be at all Times thoroughly engaged and attentive on their Duty; and when Tribulation or Persecution ariseth because of the Word, to be ready to sacrifice their dearest Interests in its Cause.

It

It is indeed a Duty incumbent upon all Christians to be zealous, strict, and laborious in the Discharge of all the Duties of their high Calling, of their christian Profession; and to study by all the Methods in their Power, (though perhaps painful and expensive) to enlarge the Kingdom of Christ, by spreading and defending christian Faith, and promoting christian Knowledge and christian Practice.

But we must beware of running into an Extreme in this Matter. The Example of the first Disciples in this Conversion of the World, is not binding upon all Christians; and it is the Spirit of Enthusiasm only which imagines it. At the first Appearance of Christianity every *Convert* became a *Preacher*; this was then indeed necessary, because the Harvest was great, and the Labourers were few; and every Convert had a *Voucher* for his Commission, and a *Provision* for the Discharge of it, in the miraculous and extraordinary Effusion of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. But the Case is otherwise now; the Company of Preachers is now sufficient for the Work — and the extraordinary and immediate Preparation for it by the Descent of

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the Holy Ghost, being also ceased, Men must be fitted and qualified for it by the natural Means of Learning and Study. As then at present it is unnecessary, so it is also improper, that every private Christian should at his Pleasure take upon him the Office of Preacher; so far would it be from furthering and promoting the christian Cause, that it would be highly hurtful and pernicious; and, if any thing could be finally so, destructive of it. For without Inspiration, it must of Necessity happen, that the ignorant and illiterate must misunderstand and misrepresent it: Must vent many Things for christian Doctrines which are not so, and overlook those that are — and consequently must maim and deface pure and genuine Christianity. In a Word; such must often speak weakly at least, if not wickedly, for God; thereby dishonouring his holy Name and his Word, and giving great Occasion to his Enemies to blaspheme.

It is not every sincere and well-meaning Person that is qualified for Preaching — a notable Instance of this is to be met with in the Acts of the Apostles, of a certain converted Jew named *Apollos*. He was a Man

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of Letters, of Eloquence, and of great Knowledge in the Scriptures; but being overfervent in Spirit, he undertook too soon to speak boldly in the Synagogue; more knowing Christians heard, and taking him, expounded unto him the Way of God more perfectly.

Yet in a qualified Sense, it is unquestionably every Man's Duty to preach the Gospel, *i. e.* it is his Duty to promote it by all Means, by Correction and Encouragement; and in private Life, even in the lowest, by seasonable Reproof and Instruction; and above all, by what is most in his Power, and what is most incumbent on him, by a good and christian Example.

But still this is not what is strictly and properly preaching the Gospel; that is the Office of the christian Ministry, peculiarly prepared and appointed to the Work: For it the private Christian has neither Commission nor Qualification, and therefore cannot attempt it without both Presumption and Prejudice.

Fifthly. Another Thing observable in the Text is, the *Success* of the Commission — the

Lord working with them, *i. e.* aiding and assisting them — co-operating and crowning with Success; nourishing and cherishing the Seed sown, till it grew up and increased unto a plenteous Harvest. And this indeed the Lord did very signally, for the Sound of the Gospel went out into all Lands, and its Words into the Ends of the World, and whole Nations became obedient to the Faith. Quick as Lightning it flew from one Part of Heaven to the other; enlightening and enlivening the whole known World, as it were at once.

An Use of this Success of the Gospel, by the Co operation of God, is to convince us of the Necessity of his Co-operation in all our Concerns; but more especially in our religious Concerns.

Another Use is, to convince us the more of the Divinity of the christian Religion, whose Success is ascribed to the Operation of the Almighty; for if the Lord worked with it, it must needs be of God.

The Weakness and Meanness of the Founders of Christianity made this Co-operation of Heaven peculiarly necessary;
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and its wonderful and surprizing Success would have proved such Co-operation, though it had not been related.

But we must beware how we make Success a Mark of Divinity; for that is claimed by opposite Causes. The Force of the Argument in Favour of Christianity lies principally in this, not that it prevailed and prospered in general, but it prevailed and prospered, notwithstanding the Weakness of its Abettors and Supporters, and the combined and fiercest Opposition of the whole World. This is peculiar to Christianity, and is a convincing Proof of its Authority.

This wonderful Success of the Gospel is, like almost every thing else, abused by Enthusiasts; every little Addition to their Sect being compared to the marvellous Increase of the Gospel, and like that ascribed to the immediate Influence and Operation of the Holy Ghost, to the Lord's working with them.

But their Success must be of another Kind than it has yet proved, and be attended with other Circumstances than have yet appeared, before it can be less than profane to imagine a Resemblance.

But

But to the Argument of Success — Success simply and in itself considered, can, as I have said, never be an Argument of Truth; for Errors, confessed and acknowledged by all the World, can boast of it.

When any Cause offers itself to our Examination, and sues for Reception, it can offer itself upon no other Foot than that of its own intrinsic Reasonableness and Excellence. Its Success is future; is dependent upon the Behaviour of the World, and consequently dependent upon its Reasonableness and Excellence, by which their Behaviour is supposed to be determined. And should it have the good Fortune to be received, to be generally received though it should fail in its Claim of Reason and Excellence, this could prove only the Mistake of the Examiners, and could give the Cause no Truth or Virtue which it had not before, nor consequently engage any future Inquirers to embrace it; it must still stand upon its own Bottom, be its Fate with Mankind what it will.

Success indeed may be so circumstanced, as to become an Argument of Truth, as in the Case of the Gospel: But then it is a *miraculous* Success, deriving all its Force from
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the Miracle, which is as fairly alledged here as in other Points.

But even miraculous as the Success was, it was no Argument to the first christian Converts, for this plain Reason, because it was consequent to their Conversion: It being not the Success which wrought their Conversion, but their Conversion which made the Success.

When *Gamaliel* gave his Advice to the Jewish Sanhedrim, to wait the Success of the Gospel before they proceeded to Extremities, he spake the Dictates of Prejudice, of Fear, and Mistrust. From what he had seen and heard of Christianity, he began to be alarmed and to mistrust that there might be something more in it than he imagined; and yet his Attachment to the Religion of his Forefathers would not suffer him to give easily into it. He was distracted between the Fear of Man on the one Hand, and the Fear of God on the other.

But in Answer to him, and to tear up this Reasoning by the Roots, let it be observed, that whatever Right either he or the Council had to stay for the Event of Things before they

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But in Answer to him, and to tear up this Reasoning by the Roots, let it be observed, that whatever Right either he or the Council had to stay for the Event of Things before they

they determine, the same Right all Mankind have.

If it be rational and justifiable for one Man to wait for Success, it must be rational and justifiable for every other Man to wait for it also: And if so, then it is plain, that whatever the Cause be, there can be no Success at all.

Lastly. The last Thing observable in this Passage of Scripture is, the *Seal* with which the christian Commission is *confirmed* — confirming the Word with Signs following. The preaching of the Gospel was followed by Signs and Wonders, and divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus did God very eminently and signally bear Witness to it — thus did he set to his Seal.

Miracles, when properly circumstanced, are on all Hands allowed to be a Mark and Character of Divinity. It is indeed not to be imagined, so far as our Imagination reaches, in what other Way than this and prophetic Predictions, which are also miraculous, the divine Interposition could be manifested: And the Evidence arising from them is heightened by the Greatness, the Number, and

and the Variety of them. And in all these Points, the Miracles wrought in Attestation of Christianity stand unrivalled. There is also another Circumstance entirely peculiar to the Christian Miracles; and that is, that the Workers of them communicated their Powers to *Multitudes*, and extended them to *Generations*.

The Use to be made of this Observation is, to be the more fixed and settled in the Belief of the christian Religion, which is established by such irrefragable and invincible Evidence of Miracles.

Another Use of this Observation is this — that it affords us a Rule, a Mark, and Character, whereby to judge of all Pretenders to divine Revelation and divine Commission. Since the christian Religion itself, notwithstanding all its internal Marks and Characters of Divinity, was yet confirmed by Signs and Wonders; no other Institution, no other Revelation can surely expect to be received, if destitute of them. No Matter how intrinsically good they are, nor no Matter with what Confidence and Assurance they are obtruded upon us, if they are unattended with

with Miracles; there is at once an End of them, and no sensible Man will ever think it worth his while to inquire more into them.

Every thing however is not to be taken for granted, for which Miracles can be produced; they must be accompanied with other Things to be satisfactory: But though the Evidence is not full wherever Miracles are, yet wherever they are not, it is deficient.

No Man's Word is to be taken in his own Cause, for he may be weak enough to be imposed upon himself, or be wicked enough to impose upon others. And therefore all Visions and Revelations, unattended by Miracles, must pass for nothing but the Imaginations of heated enthusiastic Brains.

All Visions and Revelations must either be of a private or a publick Intent; must either be designed for the Use only of the Party to which they are made, or for the general Good of the World. If the former be the Case, no one is at all concerned about, nor has any Business to inquire into their Reality; but if it is pretended that Mankind have any Interest in them, then they must have outward and visible Signs, or no thinking Man can give into them.

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The *Visibility* of the Sign is as necessary as the *Greatness*. This the Nature of all Signs require; and therefore indeed it is no Matter how great it be, if it be not such as Men's Senses can judge of it.

By this are the Enthusiasts cut out from a common Subterfuge to which they have Recourse, when pressed upon this Head of Miracles; — and that is, that though they do not cure the lame and the blind, and other such like Works, yet they can do what is greater, they can work the Conversion of a Sinner. Now in the first Place it is false that the Conversion of a Sinner is a more difficult Work than the miraculous Cure of Diseases; for every one knows that that may be effected, and in Fact has, it is to be hoped very often has, been effected by natural Means, aided and assisted by the Co-operation of God's Grace: But the Cure of Diseases, in a miraculous Way, in a Way our blessed Saviour and his Apostles cured them, by a Word, or a Touch, &c. has no Assistance from, or Connection with, any natural Means whatsoever: So far otherwise, that it is a Triumph *over* all the Laws of Nature, and consequently implies the Power of the Lord of Nature.

But

But be that as it will; let their Conversions be raised to what Height of Miracle they please; let them if they judge it decent, set them above all the miraculous Cures even of our Lord himself, yet the Conversion of a Sinner being wrought in the Heart of Man, it can be seen by him only who sees the Heart. So long as there is such a Thing as Hypocrisy in the World, Man can never be a Judge of it; however therefore Conversion may be a *Miracle*, yet it can never be a *Sign*: And consequently can never be admitted in Evidence — it is indeed utterly impertinent to the Business of *Conviction*.

Thus necessary are visible and external Miracles, to the Proof of an extraordinary Commission and Authority. These are, as *St. Paul* styles them, the *Signs* of an Apostle; and therefore without them, no Imitation of their Lives and Manners, no Affectation of their Phrase and Language, nor any other Pretence will justify the assuming of their Character.

Religion is the great and common Concern of all Men; far be it therefore from us, in any Degree to discourage Application to it. No; it is all that is truly worthy of it. But
then

then we should remember, that it is a manly and a rational Service, and therefore to be conducted in a rational Way; In a Way suitable to the Situation Providence has at present placed us in — It is the Words of Truth and Soberness, and therefore cannot dictate Pride and Vanity; nor can be carried on in a disorderly, riotous, and tumultuous Manner — Of such Behaviour that can never be the Parent, which is itself the Child, not of the Author of Confusion, but of Peace.

Thus have I gone through the several Particulars of the Text — The christian Commission — The Character of the Persons to whom it was given — The Extent of it — The Zeal with which it was executed — The Success with which it was attended — The Seal with which it was confirmed — And it is highly remarkable, how averse every Article is to the Spirit of Enthusiasm. And indeed were the Scriptures duly studied and understood, and Attention given to the Sense and Spirit of them, as well as to the Letter, it would be impossible for any honest Persons to persevere in Practices so contrary to them — In Practices so subversive of all Order and Regularity — In Practices so prejudicial to the

christian Church, and so dishonourable to the christian Name — In Practices which fill the Minds of the weak and ignorant with Doubts and Perplexities, ending always in one or other of the equally dreadful Extremes, Presumption or Despair.

Be not deceived: These enthusiastick Pretences are not new and modern; they are like all the other present Objections to, and Corruptions of, Christianity; Revivals only of antient Heresies and antient Corruptions: These Pretenders are therefore of tried, of proved Faultiness; they have been long since and often weighed in the Balance of the Sanctuary, and always found wanting; always found to be in the Herd, Weakness and Ignorance; and in the Leaders, Ambition, Avarice, and Sensuality; Ambition, Avarice, and Sensuality, always most successfully carried on under the specious Covering of Religion; Ambition, Avarice, and Sensuality, of which the present enthusiastick Champions, like their Forerunners in Enthusiasm, have given some pretty strong Symptoms, if not demonstrative Proofs.

Iniquity gilded over with Religion — Tremendous Wickedness! — But however, think

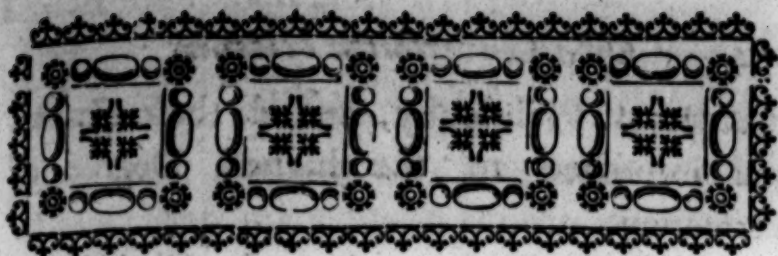
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it not too great to be credible, for the Scriptures warn us against it, by telling us, that Satan himself can be transformed into an Angel of Light; the better to carry on the Interests of Hell, in the Garb of Heaven.

Trust not then to Appearances, no not to heavenly Appearances; — Have not Men's Persons in Admiration — Those especially who speak of themselves great swelling Words of Vanity. Be fully satisfied of these two Truths, and you will not easily fall from your Stedfastness — That Men of moderate Claims and Pretences, are likeliest to be Men of Truth and Sincerity — And that the written Word of God is the sole Rule of your Faith and Practice.



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S E R M O N VII.

*Of a Conversation becoming the
Gospel of Christ.*



PHILIPPIANS i. 27.

*Only let your Conversation be as it
becometh the Gospel of Christ.*



HOEVER has but looked into
the New Testament, must be
abundantly convinced, that the
christian Religion is the most
noble and excellent Institution that ever ap-
peared in the World. In it are contained all
the Duties of Morality; all the wise and good

Precepts of Philosophy, and all these exalted and improved to the highest Degree of Perfection.

If we would know how far Christianity surpasses all the Systems of Morality, all the Institutions that were before it, we need but turn to those three Chapters in the Beginning of St. *Matthew's* Gospel, known by the Name of our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount. There we shall find the antient Morality corrected and improved: There with Admiration may we perceive, how infinitely the greatest Improvements in natural Knowledge, fall short of Revelation.

To the Jews, we are told, some Things were permitted for the Hardness of their Hearts; and therefore the mosaic Law did not make *all Things perfect* — But not so Christianity. The Time of Reformation is now come; the Time, when Religion is in all Points to be carried to its utmost Perfection.

Christianity therefore presents itself an Institution of consummate Goodness: Holy as its great Author is holy; perfect, as he is perfect. The Description St. *Paul* gives us of it is this — “The Grace of God which
“bringeth Salvation, hath appeared unto all
“Men;

“Men; teaching us, that denying Ungod-
“liness and worldly Lusts, we should live
“soberly, righteously, and godly in this
“present World.” And the Prophet *Daniel*
speaking of the Gospel styles it — The
bringing in of everlasting Righteousness. In
a Word; whatsoever Things are true, what-
soever Things are honest, whatsoever Things
are just, whatsoever Things are pure, what-
soever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things
are of good Report; if there be any thing
virtuous, any thing praise-worthy; these and
all these are the Contents of Christianity.

. But the Excellency of the Doctrines of
Christianity is too manifest, too glaring to be
disputed. Its Enemies confess it; and this
is at Bottom the Cause that they are its
Enemies.

Let us then turn to the Obligations which
this acknowledged Excellence brings us
under; to the Influence it should have on
us. Let us consider how we are bound to
fill the great Title of Christians; to have our
Conversation such as *becometh* the Gospel of
Christ.

A Conversation becoming the Gospel of
Christ implies these two Things:

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First,

First. An Obedience *conformable* to Christian *Precepts*.

And Secondly. An Obedience *flowing* from Christian *Principles*.

First. A Christian Conversation implies an Obedience conformable to Christian Precepts. Christians are a Body of Men, formed into a Society under one common Head, Jesus Christ; and Christianity is the Body of Laws by which that Society is modelled and governed. Christian Conversation must therefore of Necessity imply christian Obedience; and this is the proper and original Idea of the Word rendered *Conversation*. It signifies in its primary Sense, the Right of Citizenship; and in a secondary one, Conversation; or a certain Method of Living; that is, that Method of Living which is suitable to the Laws and Constitutions of the City or Society of which we are Members. To have our Conversation then as becometh the Gospel of Christ, is, in other Words, to have our Course and Manner of Life conformable to the Laws and Injunctions of Christianity.

Now to this we are obliged by many and important Reasons.

First,

First. We are obliged to it as we would behave like *reasonable* Creatures. To enter into, to continue in, and to express an Affection for any Society, and yet at the same Time, not to be influenced by the Principles on which it is founded, nor by the Rules by which it is ordered, is an high Instance of Folly and Absurdity. It is a Conduct which no Society, were its Power equal to its Inclination, would endure; and which no Pretence can vindicate. It cannot avoid the Charge either of most *insincere*, or most *irrational*: The former is Artifice, is Fraud and Iniquity; the latter is Folly and Absurdity. And this is what we are at present to consider, the Question being about the Behaviour of those, who really and sincerely acknowledge the Authority of the Gospel.

There is nothing more unworthy of a rational Creature, than to act inconsistently with his Profession. Things may be affirmed or denied by Actions as well as Words; and therefore to make Profession of one Thing, and to do another, is to affirm and deny the same Thing at the same Time: And he who in the general Course of his Life, behaves after this Manner, may be properly said to
live

live a Lie. And thus St. Paul reasons — They who provide not for their own, deny the Faith — They profess to know God, but in Works they deny him.

But again; To lay down certain Principles of Action, and then knowingly and wilfully to act in direct Opposition to those Principles, is such an Absurdity, that did not every Day's Experience teach us the contrary, we would never believe a reasonable Creature could be guilty of. Nay, notwithstanding this Experience, we can scarcely yet persuade ourselves of it: For when the Actions are observed to contradict his professed Principles, we are apt immediately to conclude, that those are not in Reality his Principles; and that what he pretends to be his Profession, is so in Pretence only. That his Practices should be so opposite to his true and real Principles, is the *last* Supposition; and well may it be, for it is absolutely without all Apology or Excuse; for to act suitably to our Sentiments is entirely in our own Power, it is also the most agreeable and natural Way of acting; nay, to contradict them, is to commit Force and Violence upon ourselves.

For

For a Creature capable of Reflection is sensible of the Relation of Things; from which, he sees, there results a certain Manner of Conduct and Behaviour, which is proper and fitting, and obligatory to him. The Sense of Things it is not in his Power to alter; and his acting in Contradiction to it, is an unnatural, and consequently a painful Operation.

When therefore we do not act agreeably to our real Professions, *i. e.* to the Sense of our Minds, we act in such a Manner, as will in all our Intervals of Reflection, affect us with the severest Affliction, the keenest Remorse.

The acting contrary to our Judgment and Profession, is in all Cases a Dishonour to our Understandings, and an Affliction to our Minds; but both rise in Proportion to the Value of the Things, in relation to which, we behave so preposterously; and therefore where the Value is infinite, they may be said to be infinite too.

A Person therefore making Profession of Christianity, and yet having a Conversation unbecoming it, has all the Infamy and Self-reproach that human Imagination can suppose;

pose; for what can raise them higher, than an Acknowledgment that Happiness and Misery, even eternal, depend upon our conforming to it.

Nothing surely can be more unbecoming than Iniquity in a Christian. Persons of other Religions may have something to offer: Their Institutions are not equally excellent; their Examples not equally bright; their Sanctions not equally striking. In a Word; all other Religions want something to make the Comers thereunto perfect; but nothing of this Kind has any Place in Christianity. The Institution is sublime and heavenly; the Example without Spot and Blemish — The Sanctions incapable of being heightened. In Christianity, in a Word, is to be met with, every thing which can be wished or wanted in Religion — every thing perfect, even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect. What Manner of Men then should Christians be, in all holy Conversation and Godliness?

What Communion hath Light with Darkness, what Concord hath Christ with *Belial*; what Fellowship, says the Apostle, hath Righteousness with Unrighteousness? Nothing surely can be supposed more opposite: And
yet

yet Purity of Profession, joined to Iniquity of Practice, seems an Attempt to reconcile them.

More ingenuous certainly is it to throw off the Mask, and to become Infidels in Faith as well as in Practice; for he that in Works, says *St. Paul*, denies the Faith, is worse than an Infidel, *i. e.* is the worse Infidel of the two.

In the Holy Scriptures we are often pressed to a good Life, for this Reason, that such is the Life which becomes the Profession of the Gospel — I beseech you, therefore, walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith you are called — walk worthy of God, who has called us unto his Kingdom and Glory — Let not Uncleanness or Covetousness be once named among you, as becometh Saints — As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all Manner of Conversation — Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ, depart from Iniquity.

But secondly. We are obliged to a Christian Conversation, as we regard the *Interest and Honour of Christianity*. It is true indeed there cannot possibly be any thing more unreasonable, than to make the bad Lives of
Christians

Christians an Objection to Christianity itself; for if the Argument proves any thing, it will prove too much: It will hold equally against Natural Religion, right Reason, nay common Sense; and for the same Reason that it is concluded, there is no Truth or Excellence in Christianity, because Christians live iniquitously; it should be concluded also, that there are no such Things as Natural Religion, right Reason, or common Sense; because the Conduct of Mankind is in the main immoral, irrational, and stupid.

The true Way of judging of any Institution is, to examine into its Nature, its Principles, its Laws, its Composition; if these be right, if it be intrinsically excellent, it is clear of all Objections, let it be regarded how it will by Mankind. Their Behaviour is *subsequent*, is *external*, is *foreign*, and therefore can in no sort affect it: Can neither add to it, nor take from it. All that their froward and disobedient Conduct can prove, is their *own Perverseness*.

But notwithstanding this be so, yet the Interest and Honour of Christianity are still affected by the Behaviour of its Votaries — For *all* Men have neither *Faith*, nor
Reason.

Reason. — All Men have not Faith. The whole World is not acquainted with Christianity, with its internal Principles and Constitution; and they who are not, can make a Judgment of it, by no other Way than by the Lives of its Professors; and that, will they say, is a sufficient Method; a Tree being known by its Fruits.

And when these Fruits are unpromising, they will hinder Mankind to taste for themselves; will prevent any Application to the Thing itself; and make them sit down contented in this settled Opinion, either that Christianity is not *excellent* in itself, as not *requiring* Goodness, or without *Life* and *Authority*, as not *producing* it.

Neither have all Men Reason: The Bulk of Mankind are not capable of examining Things to the Bottom; and therefore are apt to be carried away by plausible Appearances. And certainly such a plausible Appearance, though not a solid Argument, is the Wickedness of Christians; for they, whose personal Acquaintance with Christianity is but slight, will be from hence apt to imagine that it is not believed heartily and thoroughly by those who have studied it, and make the loudest Professions

Professions of it; and from thence conclude that there is nothing in it at all; that the whole is mere Fiction and Policy: And this Inference they will be the readier to draw in Proportion to the greater Innocency and Goodness of their own Hearts; for they will imagine it *Ingratitude* not to be supposed, for Persons to receive such Favours from God, as Christians say they have, and at the same Time to fly in his Face:—And *Stupidity* not to be possible, for Men in earnest to believe a Heaven and a Hell, and yet deliberately forfeit the one, and run headlong into the other.

The bad Lives of Christians are then in Fact a Prejudice to the Honour and Interest of Christianity: They *retard* its *Progress abroad*, and *lessen* its *Influence at Home*. It is therefore the Duty of all Christians to order their Lives so, as to give as little Occasion of Reproach and Misconstruction as possibly may be.

In Answer to this, it is not sufficient to retort the Absurdity of the Objection; for Mankind we know are very commonly absurd, and christian Zeal, if we are thoroughly warmed

warmed with it, will prompt us to prevent and disappoint even Absurdity itself.

We know well in what severe Terms we are cautioned against giving Offence. Now Offence in the Nature of it is properly Misconception and Misconstruction: It arises from Weakness of Understanding, and is a Disgust taken at, or an ill Use made of, what is in Nature innocent, but in Appearance evil.

Now from hence it follows, that the Unreasonableness of an Objection is no Cause why we should not take care to prevent it. It is our Duty to do so in Things *innocent* and *indifferent*; and therefore much more surely in Matters *wicked* and *criminal*, in Things concerning which it would have been our Duty to have acted otherwise, though no Offence had accompanied them. The Offence therefore given by the unbecoming, the unworthy Conversation of Christians, (as that is upon other Accounts unsufferable) has the highest Degree of Guilt that Offence is capable of.

In the Holy Scriptures we often find this Argument of the Honour and Interest of Christianity insisted on. — Let your Light so

shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven — Have your Conversation honest among the Gentiles — and adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things — that the Name of God and his Doctrine be not blasphemed. — Thou that makest thy Boast of the Law, through breaking the Law, dishonourest thou God? For the Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.

Thirdly. We are obliged to have our Conversation such as becometh the Gospel of Christ, as we *regard ourselves*, as we are tender of *our own Interest*. The christian Religion has done so much for us: It is so great a Salvation, that it is impossible to imagine that we shall escape the most tremendous Punishment, if we neglect it.

It has given us the clearest and most ample Knowledge of our Duty in all its Branches; has dispersed all the Clouds of Darkness and Ignorance, which surrounded us; and shines upon us with full Day-light.

Now the Obligations which Knowledge lays upon us, are confessed by all; That he who knows his Master's Will, and does it
not,

not, should be beaten with many Stripes, is the Voice both of God and Man: For Sins against Knowledge are Acts of Insolence and Presumption.

But Christianity is not content with barely shewing us our Duty: It goes on to excite and animate to Performance; it goes on to warm our Affections; and to make sure of our Happiness, by engaging our Passions on its Side. It displays the Love of God in a new and marvellous Light; presents to us the whole Deity unfolding itself for our Sakes; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, co-operating in the great Work of our Redemption, and that by a Method of Love as much above the utmost Stretch of our Capacities, as the divine *Essence* is.

Love, it is said, produceth Love; well therefore surely should we love that God, who has, in such an ineffable Manner, first loved us. And what must Ingratitude be? Is it possible to Man? Is he, with all his Corruptions about him, depraved enough to admit it? It is not to be denied. Every Day's Experience shews it.

Unhappy Man! That Goodness will not move: For what is Abuse of Goodness to

expect. This is Sin, of all others the most exceeding sinful; the most heightened and exaggerated that can be. And such are the Sins of Christians: And can we then wonder that everlasting Misery is their Punishment: As is their Guilt, so is their Punishment; both of them incapable of Addition.

Can there then be any Arguments wanting to shew the Necessity of a christian Conversation? If Heaven and Hell are not sufficient, whither shall we go for them — All Nature saith, they are not in me.

Arguments drawn from Interest are generally found the most forcible and prevailing: Forcible enough to bear down all before them, to make us trample even upon the dearest and most inviolable Rights. Follow it here, it is no where else so much concerned.

The Doctrine of a future State, and of Rewards and Punishments in that State, suitable to the Manner of our Life here, was a Doctrine by no means well settled and established in the Heathen World; and their Uncertainty in this capital Article was, no Doubt of it, some Mitigation of their Faults. But Christians are clear in this Matter: Life and Immortality are fully brought to Life by
the

the Gospel ; and the Transgressors of its Laws run with open Eyes upon Destruction — And what Aggravation, what Desperateness is this ?

Thus are we bound to a christian Conversation by every Tie, every Obligation imaginable :

By a Regard to our own Dignity as rational Creatures.

By a Regard to the Reputation and Prosperity of our Religion.

By the superior Knowledge we enjoy.

By the superior Favours we are blessed with.

By the greater Evils we are threatened with.

By Honour and Dishonour ; by evil Report and good Report ; by our Love and by our Fear.

Remember these Things, and you will be always *ready* and *able* too, to say with our Fore-runners in the Faith — I am a Christian, and can do no Evil.

But secondly. A Conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ implies, besides an Obedience conformable to christian Precepts,

an Obedience flowing from christian Principles.

Christian Principles are the Life and Soul of christian Obedience — They are what distinguish it from the Obedience of Men of other Religions — And what alone can be supposed to render it acceptable in the Sight of God.

First, They are the Life and Soul of Christian Obedience. Without these it is cold and languid ; even as the Body without the Spirit is dead ; uninspired with what should raise and inflame it. Christianity supplies us with new Motives to Action ; with Motives as much superior to those we were before possessed of, as *Grace* is superior to *Nature*, as *Redemption* is more valuable than *Creation*. The Display too of the Doctrine of three Persons in the Deity opens to us a new Field, and affords us a fresh Fund of Motives for Obedience, for Praise, for Worship, and Adoration.

The Principles of Nature and Reason are certainly sufficient to produce in a reasonable Creature a Sense of Duty and Obedience to its Creator ; but surely no Man will compare them

them with the Principles of Revelation: Revelation conveys new Spirit and Energy to the Principles of Nature, and carries them to Heights, to which, by their own native Force, they could never arrive. The Idea of Creator commands, no Doubt of it, our utmost Love and Duty; and yet I imagine there is no one who does not find himself differently affected with that of Redeemer. His Heart, I presume, will burn with a Heat unfelt before; his Love and Devotion rise to unwonted Heights; his whole Soul will be overborne, by this Addition of infinite to infinite.

Again; Christian Principles are what alone distinguish the Obedience of Christians from the Obedience of Persons of other Religions. The Morality of Christians (though in some Instances more enlightened) is in the main the same with the Law of Nature. How then in Cases where these Laws do agree, shall the Christian and the mere Moralist be distinguished? How too shall he be distinguished from Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans? For their Laws of Virtue are in several Articles the same with ours. It is the Principle alone which can distinguish them.

The Actions are often materially the same; 'tis the Sentiment of the Heart from which they flow, that confers the different Character. And this is the Case in all Duties which are common to several Religions. They are the Motives upon which they are performed, that gives them their different Denomination; and an Obedience to the Laws of Christ, unless upon the Principles of Christ, is not a *christian Obedience*.

Principles are indeed Matters of such Moment in Religion, that when they are different, the Religions are truly different, though all the Laws and Ordinances should be supposed to be the same: And when the Principles are the same, the Religions are properly so too, though all their Laws and Ordinances should be supposed to be different.

Lastly; Christian Principles are the only Principles which can be supposed to render our Obedience acceptable in the Sight of God.

Christianity has introduced a new Way of thinking in Religion, and has put Things upon a different Footing from what they were before. It has made several new Discoveries, published new Articles, formed a new Scheme,

Scheme, and thereby created a new Set of Relations.

Now it is evident, that if this is the Case, no Obedience can be acceptable in the Sight of God, but that which is formed upon this *Plan*: And that for this plain Reason, because no other Obedience is conformable to his *Will*.

God is the sole Author of all Religion, and therefore his good Pleasure must be the sole Rule of it — If therefore he thinks proper to alter his Manner of dealing with Mankind, and to introduce new Dispensations, those Dispensations from thenceforth must become our Law, and we can have no Title to Acceptance, but in and through them.

No Matter therefore what the Principles of Morality are supposed; no Matter that the Law of Nature was once the Law of God; nay, if you will, what it never was, the *only* Law of God: Yet the Principles of Morality are not the only *proper* Principles now; neither is the Law of Nature, as such, the only *Law now in Being*; the Law in *Force* is Christianity; that is the Covenant at *present* subsisting between God and Man; and therefore unless we act conformably to *this* Law, and upon the

the Terms of *this* Covenant, we reject the *present* Counsel of God, and are Rebels to his Authority: If we do not comply with the Religion *in being*, to use the favourite Language of the Moralists themselves, we do not act agreeable to the present *Fitness* of Things, to the *Relations now* subsisting, and therefore must certainly be criminal in the Sight of God.

To conclude. The Apostle, in the Close of the Verse wherein he exhorts to a christian Conversation, adds also this other Exhortation — To strive for the Faith of the Gospel: As supposing evidently christian Faith to be the proper Basis of christian Obedience.

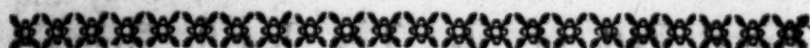
Upon any other Ground Christianity has nothing to do with it: It is not Obedience at all; for however we may do what the Gospel enjoins, yet we do not *obey* the Gospel; for in such Case we do indeed what Christ commands, but not *because* he commands — And such can surely never be the Conversation *becoming* the Gospel of Christ.

S E R M O N



S E R M O N VIII.

Of the Obligation both of positive and negative Goodness.



ISAIAH i. 16, 17.

Cease to do Evil, learn to do well.

THIS Chapter is an earnest and affectionate Exhortation to the People of the Jews, to repent and turn to God, and to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance. That People, though under the immediate Guidance of Heaven, (such is the Corruption and Perverseness of human Nature) had nevertheless depraved and vitiated their Religion; they had

had sunk it from spiritual, vital, and substantial; into low, trifling, and formal: They rested in the Shell and Outside of it; regardless of that Purity of Heart and Sanctity of Life, which constitute its Essence. Ceremonial Observances, numerous and burdensome as they were, yet as they subdued not the Heart, they found the most easy to be complied with; and therefore it was their common Practice to press the Obligation of the ritual Part of the Law; and by false Glosses to invalidate and explain away the moral Part of it. The Jewish Religion appears to us, who are accustomed to the easy Yoke of the Gospel, to be in itself abundantly clogged and embarrassed with ritual Observances; and yet light was that Burthen, and easy to be borne, if compared with that stupendous Heap of Traditions of their Fathers, which they imposed upon themselves. This they did by way of *Commutation*, in Hopes to atone for the *Want of Virtue*, by *Ceremony*. And indeed since they could persuade themselves that this would do, it is no Wonder that they heightened it beyond all Measure; for there is nothing which Mankind will not rather comply with, than

than part with their Lufts. This is the Difficulty, the grand Objection to all Religion. Indulge but these, and every thing else will go easily down: This Purchase is never thought dear.

But as Religion is not modelled after our Inclinations, but our Inclinations should be conformable to it, and consequently Vice and Wickedness plucked up by the Roots, we find the Law and the Prophets inculcating the great Duties of Morality, in the strongest and most forcible Manner. It was indeed the peculiar Office of the Prophets to rescue the Law from corrupt Interpretations, to clear up its Difficulties, to open its spiritual Sense and Meaning, and to enforce that Sense of it, upon the Consciences of the People. For a pregnant Proof of this, we need go no farther than the Scripture now before us, in which the Prophet labours this Point with great Earnestness; *proving and illustrating* it by every thing which is *forcible in Argument*, and *beautiful in Composition* — “Hear the
“Word of the Lord, ye Rulers of *Sodom*;
“give Ear unto the Law of our God, ye
“People of *Gomorrab*. To what Purpose is
“the Multitude of your Sacrifices unto me?
“faith

“saith the Lord: I am full of the Burnt-
“offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed
“Beasts; and I delight not in the Blood of
“Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-goats.
“When ye come to appear before me, who
“hath required this at your Hand to tread
“my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations;
“Incense is an Abomination unto me, the
“new Moons and Sabbaths, the calling of
“Assemblies, I cannot away with it, it is
“Iniquity. Even your solemn Meetings,
“your new Moons, and your appointed
“Feasts my Soul hateth; they are a Trouble
“unto me, I am weary to bear them. And
“when ye stretch forth your Hands, I will
“hide mine Eyes from you; yea, when ye
“make many Prayers, I will not hear.
“Your Hands are full of Blood; wash ye,
“make you clean, put away the Evil of your
“Doings from before mine Eyes. Cease to
“do Evil, learn to do well. Seek Judgment,
“relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless,
“plead for the Widow.” — Nothing can be
a stronger Exhortation to Works of Righte-
ousness and Virtue, than this; nothing a more
powerful Call, from resting in ritual Ob-
servances independently of moral Goodness.

But

But to prevent a very dangerous Mistake, viz. an Apprehension that moral Virtue is the whole of our Duty, and ritual Observances of no Obligation at all; it is to be noted, that the Design of the Prophet is by no Means to set aside these Observances, but only to shew the Insufficiency of them, separately and alone. If he meant more than this; instead of *explaining* the Law, he would have *abolished* it. But that indeed he meant no more, is plain from his own Words; for he no where says that solemn Assemblies are in themselves disagreeable; Oblations, in their own Nature, vain and trifling; and Incense in itself abominable. But that they were *become so*, by the Iniquity of the Offerers — That the Feasts of God's own appointing his Soul now hated; that the Sacrifices and Offerings which formerly rendered him propitious, were now become fruitless and insignificant; and that the Incense, which was once a sweet-smelling Savour, was now converted into a Nuisance; and all this because, even because their Hands were full of Blood, stained and defiled with Cruelty, and every other Species of Vice and Immorality.

The

The Prophet's Doctrine is therefore, in short, this: That Rites and Ceremonies, and positive Injunctions, are not of themselves, and without Regard to any thing else, well-pleasing in the Sight of God; that the Practice of Righteousness and Virtue is of indispensable Obligation also; and that such Practice is the only Way, (not to atone for the Neglect of them) but to *render them acceptable*.

Having thus opened the Design and Intention of the Prophet in this Place, I shall proceed to a further Consideration of his Words; and to lay before you the doctrinal and practical Inferences which follow from them. And for this Purpose, I shall take them in their full and largest Extent; *Cease to do Evil*, as a Prohibition of every Kind and Degree of Wickedness and Vice; and *learn to do well*, as a positive Injunction to discharge our Duty in every Point, to the utmost of our Abilities.

And First. From these Words it follows, that the positive Commands of God are of equal Obligation with the negative ones; and that a Person who has nothing more to say
for

for himself, than that he has done no Evil, is not within the Terms of the Covenant; as having by no Means done all that was his Duty to do.

Between the positive and negative Precepts of the Law, in point of Obligation, the only Difference is this; that the negative ones, when delivered in general Terms, 'are of continued, uninterrupted Obligation; obliging always and at all Times; 'it being never lawful to do that, which is absolutely forbidden to be done; but the positive Commands oblige only at certain Times and upon certain Occasions; as Opportunity offers, as Necessity requires, and as Prudence directs. — And the Reason of this Difference is very manifest: For negative Precepts, enjoining a Cessation of Action, with these we may always comply; for it is always in our Power to abstain from acting. But positive Precepts, commanding something to be done, it is impossible we should be without Interruption exercised in them, especially as there are more Commands of this Nature than one.

But this, it is evident affects only the Time of Obligation, not the Obligation itself. That is in both, of the same Nature, of the

same Kind, and of the same Degree: And so it must necessarily be, if the Source and Foundation of all Obligation be the Will of God; for then every thing, which is declared to be equally his Will, is equally obligatory upon us. There can be no Difference in his Commands, but what he himself is pleased to make: And if we presume to make any, where he has made none, then it is plain, that it is not the divine Authority, but something else which influences our Conduct; and this is to cast off his Supremacy.

Upon this Principle it is then, that seemingly very hard, but in Reality very reasonable Declaration of St. *James* is founded: "Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend but in one Point, is guilty of all." There is no Difference in the Laws of God; as they have all the same Author, they are all of the same Obligation. As it is one and the same Lawgiver, who says, Do not kill, Do not commit Adultery, Do not steal, and so on; his Authority is either good in all Cases, or in none. And if it is a Sense of this Authority which leads us to Obedience, that Obedience will be uniform; but if it be partial, and while we conform to some Precepts

cepts we act contrary to others, whatever plausible Pretences we may devise, the Authority of the Lawgiver is manifestly set at nought, and we are reputed both in *Law* and *Equity* Transgressors of the whole.

It may be objected perhaps, that considering the Depravity of human Nature, there seems to be no little Merit in ceasing to do Evil; and that the Character of *doing no Harm* is far from a contemptible one.

To this it is answered, that the Measures of right and wrong are not to be taken from the Practice of Man, but from the Law of God: And therefore the Question is not how Mankind behave, but how they *ought* to behave.

That they generally behave wrong, is plain from what our blessed Saviour himself tells us; that the Path which leadeth to Destruction is the most publick and frequented Road; that many there be who travel that Way. But that the Way which leadeth to Life is strait and narrow; and that few are the Passengers which are found in it. Now from this Declaration it follows, that the Prevalence and Universality of any Kind

of Behaviour is so far from being an Argument in Favour of it; that on the contrary we should suspect the Lawfulness of general Custom, for that very Reason, because it is general.

If the mere abstaining from Evil be sufficient for our Purpose, what becomes of those numerous and strong Passages in Holy Writ which recommend, which insist upon Perfection, or at least upon our best and most earnest Endeavours after it. Is such negative Goodness consistent with growing in Grace; with abounding more and more in good Works; and in being filled with the Fruits of Righteousness? Will this Conduct fill the Import of those Precepts of "Giving all
" Diligence to add to our Faith, Virtue; to
" Virtue, Knowledge; to Knowledge, Tem-
" perance; to Temperance, Patience; to Pa-
" tience, Godliness; to Godliness, brotherly
" Kindness;" and so on.

Can we by this only, ever arrive at the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ?

And therefore can this be the Character of the Just, whose Path is like the shining Light
which

which shineth more and more unto the perfect Day; gradually brightning from Day-dawn to meridian Sunshine?

To endeavour after Perfection, is a natural Duty; for it is the Dictate of Reason as well as of Revelation, to seek the Lord with our whole Desire; to cleave unto him and to serve him with all our Heart and all our Soul, *i. e.* to employ the whole Man in his Service. — And is this done by barely ceasing to do Evil?

What Merit there is in this, we may judge from what passes among ourselves; from the different Sentiments we entertain for those who take all Opportunities of obliging us, and those who only do not disoblige: The former, as Friends, we embrace with the warmest Affection; the latter, we coolly regard, as just not our Enemy.

But indeed this Case is formally decided in Holy Scripture, in the Parable of a King, distributing Talents to his Servants to trade with, and to make Improvement of, in his Absence. Among these, there was one found, who instead of turning what was delivered to him to Advantage, in Truth very slothfully, but in Appearance, very carefully

and honestly wrapt it up in a Napkin, and hid it in the Earth. It is not said, that this Servant misapplied his Lord's Money; that he had purloined it to his own Use, or squandered it upon his Pleasures. No! The Charge is, not that he had employed it to bad Purposes, but that he had not employed it at all: That, as he had not done Evil with it, neither had he done Good with it; and therefore he is only pronounced an *unprofitable* Servant.

But then it is to be observed, that his Sentence is the same with that of the positive Offender: It is, to be cast into outer Darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of Teeth; and no more is denounced against the Murderer, the Adulterer, the Fornicator, and all the rest of the hideous Tribe.

Nor is it to be wondered at, that so severe should be the Punishment of mere Unprofitableness; for, since it is the Voice both of Reason and Religion, that our Debt to Heaven is never to be paid; that when we have exerted all our Abilities both of Soul and Body, in the Service of our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer; when we have done all that human Nature can do, we are
still

still unprofitable Servants; having done no more than what was *barely* our Duty to do: Since I say there is no Merit in doing *all* that is possible, surely there must be infinite Demerit, in doing *nothing*.

In this Parable it is remarkable likewise, that the unprofitable Servant had only one single Talent committed to his Trust. It is expressly said, that the Number of Talents delivered to each Person was in Proportion to his Abilities; and this Person had but one. From whence we may observe, that those who only do no Harm; who aim no higher than at the low Praise of being negatively good, are Persons of a mean and contemptible Character: Of little groveling Spirits, contented with creeping through Life, as they think, safe and secure; shrinking at the Mention of Difficulty and Danger; and incapable of being fired with the Prospect of *distinguished* Reward.

Worldly Ambition may be thought an Indication of a *little* Mind, because the highest worldly Attainments may be thought below the Concern of a *great* one — But in Religion and Virtue it is otherwise — here is every thing which can be conceived capable

of raising and animating the Soul; and therefore to be without Ambition in this Case, is to be insensible. — And as true Humility is an inseparable Companion of true Greatness of Mind, a noble Spirit will think the least Reward infinitely above his Merit, while at the same Time he is gloriously contending for the highest.

But even from the least Reward are they excluded, who only cease to do Evil. Nor is all their Punishment only negative, (*viz.*) an Exclusion from Happiness: No; as by being only negatively good, they contract positive Guilt, they are involved, with other Offenders, in positive Misery.

Well therefore should we be employed, if in our religious Examinations, we would honestly ask ourselves, what *Good* have we done, as well as what *Evil* have we not done. We can clear ourselves, perhaps, from great Offences; we are not Murderers, Adulterers, Fornicators; we are not guilty of Robbery, of Rapine, of Extortion; we swear not, we lie not, we slander not. Well! Excellently begun. Upon so solid and noble a Foundation go on; rear and compleat the beauteous Fabrick of Religion; they who
have

have done so much (for this is not without its Difficulty) may, if they please, do more. Go on, I say; from suffering your Appetites just not to carry you into Excess, advance a Step higher in your Dominion, and make them subservient to Reason and Religion — From doing Man no Injury, proceed to do him Good — And, from not presumptuously incensing the Almighty, become zealous in his Service — This if we do, our Righteousness will have its perfect Work, and we ourselves our full Reward. But if we stop short of this; and on so noble a Ground-work lay only Wood, Hay, and Stubble; such Work will by no means abide the Trial; and consequently the preposterous Workman will be destroyed.

Secondly. From this Precept of the Prophet, we may learn also, that the negative Commands are of equal Obligation with the positive; and that it is no more sufferable to commit Evil, than it is to neglect to do well — Such is the Depravity of human Nature, such our Attachment to Appetite and Passion; so reluctant, so unwilling are we to give up our favourite Follies, that we have Recourse to every Device, try every
Artifice

Artifice to prevent the bitter Parting. Hence it is, that some contend for the Merit of ceasing to do Evil; others, for that of learning to do well. They whose particular Temper and Situation expose them but little to Vice and Immorality, but whose Indolence and Slothfulness render them averse to a more active Scene, endeavour to persuade themselves, that what they call their Harmlessness and Inoffensiveness will be sufficient to their Purpose. While they on the contrary, whose warmer Temperature disposes them to Vice and Sensuality, flatter themselves that by some shining Acts of Religion in other Instances, they may possibly atone for their criminal Indulgences — The former Opinion, I have already exposed; nor is the Absurdity of the latter less glaring.

For the very Attempt to learn to do well, without first ceasing to do Evil, is preposterous and irrational in the highest Degree — For it is to begin at the wrong End — It is to build an House without a Foundation — It is to plunge into the Mysteries of a Science, without being taught the Rudiments of it — It is to aim at *Perfection* before *Initiation*.

But besides this, such Conduct is utterly inconsistent

inconsistent with every Principle of Reason and Revelation.

For Reason and Revelation tell us, that the Seat of Religion is the Heart — and if so, then here we must begin: Our first Employment must be to sweep and garnish; to cleanse and purify that, to qualify it for, and to render it susceptible of the Impressions of Religion; and this, I believe, will not be allowed possible, 'till we cease to do Evil.

Reason and Revelation tell us further, that it is the Principle that sanctifies the Action; and that that Principle is a Sense of Duty. But such Sense cannot be the Principle of Virtue in those, who in other Instances persevere in the Practice of Iniquity; for if it were, it would constrain them likewise to break off that Practice.

Reason and Revelation tell us lastly, that unless we give God our Heart, we give him nothing. Unless we serve him with our whole Soul, we serve him not at all — But it is manifest that he who habitually indulges his vicious Inclinations in some Cases, however righteous he may appear in others, does by no means serve God entirely. No; the Almighty has a Rival and Competitor in his Breast.

Breast. The Man has two Masters, between whom he would fain divide his Services; the one he *cannot* quit, nor *would* he willingly quit the other. He therefore endeavours to compound Matters; and offers a more punctual Attendance on his Duty in some Cases, by way of *Commutation* for criminal Indulgences in others — But alas! these Men do but weave the Spider's Web; fruitless and insignificant is their Labour.

They hatch the Cockatrice Eggs, which by and by will break out into a Viper: They do what in the End will turn out to their Confusion and Condemnation.

As the habitual Sinner has his Heart and Conscience defiled, nothing good can come out of him. Nothing is pure to him, every thing is polluted by his Touch. Religion and Virtue, when practised by him, lose both their Name and Nature, and become converted into *splendid Sins*.

Nor need this seem strange; for Acts of Religion and Virtue in an habitual Sinner, are like Professions of Affection and Loyalty to a Prince, from a Person who is a secret Well-wisher to his Enemies. And if the Prince, did he know it, would be far from
accepting

accepting of any Services from such Hands, much less may we suppose the Almighty to accept them; on the contrary they must be hateful and offensive.

Though therefore we be never so good and circumspect in many Respects — Though we have Faith so that we could remove Mountains — Though we depart not from the Temple, but serve God with Fastings and Prayer, Night and Day — Though we give all our Goods to feed the poor — Nay though we give our own Bodies to be burned — yet if we cease not to do Evil, all is to no Purpose: If we persevere in the habitual Practice of any one known wilful Sin, that single Sin will, in the last great Day, rise up in Judgment against us, and condemn us; that alone, as a Mill-stone about our Necks, will drown us in Destruction and Perdition.

If then we are in earnest with Religion, and resolved no longer to play with everlasting Happiness and Misery, let us begin, where in all Reason we should begin, with breaking off our Sins, with cutting them up by the Roots: Then the good Seed will have Room to take Root, to spring up and increase; to abound in all the Fruits of Righteousness.

S E R M O N

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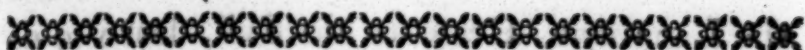
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S E R M O N IX.

Of the Obligation both of positive and negative Goodness.



ISAIAH i. 16, 17.

Cease to do Evil, learn to do well.



N a former Discourse on these Words, I proposed to shew you the doctrinal and practical Inferences flowing from them; and then I mentioned two, the Necessity of positive as well as of negative Goodness; the Obligation of doing some Good, as well as of doing no Harm; and also the Necessity of negative as well as of positive Goodness: Of
doing

doing no Harm, as well as of doing some Good; the Absurdity of pretending, and the Impossibility of doing, Works of Righteousness, without first breaking off our Sins; while we indulged ourselves in the Practice of any one known Violation of the Laws of God. And I now proceed to mention more of these Inferences. And therefore

Thirdly. From this Passage of Scripture we may observe, what is the true and proper Notion of Repentance. The whole Chapter is an Exhortation to Repentance, and this is the Language, Cease to do Evil, learn to do well.

There is nothing, I believe, in the whole System of Religion more misunderstood, than the Nature of Repentance; and the Reason is, not that the Scriptures are not clear upon that Head, but because Men have a Mind to misunderstand it. Repentance consists in the parting with our Vices, and in the Practice of the opposite Virtues: But this is of all Things the most difficult to be *acknowledged*, because it is the most difficult to be *performed*. Hence great Pains have been taken to place Repentance in something else; as in Sorrow, Prayer, Resolution. These indeed are so

many preparatory Steps to, and necessary Concomitants of Repentance; but they are not the Thing itself. They indeed point it out to us, and lead us to it; and that is the Reason that they are inseparably annexed to it. Sorrow is to prevent the Repetition of what now gives us Pain — Prayer is to prevent fresh Provocations, by keeping up the Sense both of divine Justice and Mercy — And Resolution is in order to something else, or it is nothing. What it, what they all drive at, is *Amendment, actual Amendment*; and as this is what they are designed to produce, they cannot be Substitutes in the Room of it.

Lastly. This Passage of the Prophet, though written before the Times of the Gospel, is a good Description of the New Birth.

The New Birth commences indeed at Baptism, by which we are born again of Water and of the Spirit. By that Ordinance we are born again of the second *Adam*, and by virtue of that Birth made Heirs of Life and Happiness; as we had inherited Sin and Misery from the first *Adam*, by virtue of this Birth also, are we then sanctified by the

Spirit of God, and from thenceforth intituled to his blessed Influence upon our Endeavours; to aid, assist, and further us in our christian Course.

This being once done, what is afterwards stiled *Regeneration* is *Repentance*; or, in the Prophet's Language, *ceasing to do Evil, and learning to do well.*

The Words that our blessed Saviour spoke, they were Spirit, and they were Life; the Regeneration therefore, the Necessity of which he inculcates, must be of a spiritual Nature; must regard the moral and religious Behaviour of the World: And if so, in what can it be more naturally supposed to consist, than in ceasing to do Evil, and learning to do well? He who has changed his Temper, his Disposition, his Nature; who from being proud, is become humble; from passionate, meek; from covetous, charitable; from cruel, compassionate; from false, true; from fraudulent, honest; from intemperate, sober; from lascivious, chaste; from profane, religious; he, I say, who is thus altered, is in a spiritual Sense, thoroughly a New Man; more so, to all the Intents and Purposes of Morality and Religion, than, if according
to

to the gross Conceptions of *Nicodemus*, he had literally entered a second Time into his Mother's Womb, and been born. — It is certain, that in common Life, we call one another *New Men* upon much less important Changes.

There is then nothing but what is very intelligible in this Doctrine of Regeneration, nor are the Marks of it less plain and manifest.

There need but two obvious Questions be asked, to determine it — Have you been regularly admitted into the christian Covenant by Baptism — And do you cease to do Evil, and learn to do well? If both these be answered in the Affirmative, all is safe; nothing can either *dismay* you *here*, or *hurt* you *hereafter*: For the true Nature of Repentance consists in *Change*; in Change of Life and Conversation; in Change of Temper and Disposition; in Change of Heart and Mind; in Change from bad to good, from vitious to virtuous, from profane to religious. It is this Alteration which is the Essence of Repentance: And so all the original Words which we render Penitence or Repentance, literally and properly import. The Greek

Word for Repentance (*μετάνοια*) is strictly *Change of Mind*; or it may be rendered also, *second Thought*, or, *after Consideration*, i. e. the Reflection of the Mind upon its former Conduct; a Reflection of Dislike and Disapprobation; which Reflection is naturally and regularly followed with Alteration. And in the Latin Tongue, it is expressed by a Word (*Resipiscencia*) *Growing wise again*, or *afterwards*, i. e. Repentance is the Returning to our Senses; the Recovery of a sound Mind; the seeing, considering, and forsaking our former Follies. The Word *Penitence* is in both Languages (*Pœnitentia*, *μεταμελεία*) expressed by Terms importing *Pain*, *Regret*, and *Anxiety*, viz. the Pain, Regret, and Anxiety, which a rational Creature feels from the Review of its past Misconduct; and this also necessarily implies Change and Alteration: Because it is against Nature and Reason, for a rational Creature to repeat those Actions, and to continue in that Course, which by Experience it knows to be productive of real and sincere Misery.

And agreeable to this Notion of the Terms, are all the Scripture Paraphrases upon them. Many and copious are its Exhortations

hortations to Repentance; and *Change of Conduct* is the grand, the one only End of all; the Point in which they all center. Observe a few of them — “ Thus saith the Lord; “ Return ye now, every one from his evil “ Ways, and make your Ways and your “ Doings good — Cast away from you all your “ Transgressions, and make you a new Heart “ and a new Spirit. — Repent and be converted, changed or turned. — Repent and “ turn to God, and bring forth Fruits meet “ for Repentance. — Thou that hast left thy “ first Love, remember from whence thou “ art fallen, and repent and do the first “ Works.” — And in the Words of the Text, “ Cease to do Evil, learn to do well.” Thus does it appear, that the Scripture Notion of Repentance is no other, than the reversing our whole moral Conduct.

And indeed if we call to mind, and seriously reflect on the Nature of God and Religion, we shall soon perceive, that nothing less than such a Change from bad to good, can possibly constitute an acceptable Repentance. For the Nature of God we know to be righteous, holy, just, and good; he is of purer Eyes than to look upon Iniquity without

Detestation and Abhorrence; and therefore nothing less than Holiness and Goodness can possibly render his Creatures well-pleasing in his Sight; and therefore to attempt to recommend ourselves to his Favour without this first and indispensable Qualification, is not only vain and fruitless, but is also hypocritical and presumptuous.

And agreeable to the Nature of God, must be the Design and Purpose of Religion: For Religion is to make us Children and Servants of God; to make us like him, holy as he is holy, perfect as he is perfect. And to carry on this Design the more effectually, the christian Religion is calculated; the professed Intention of which, as it says of itself, is to teach Men to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World; to perfect Holiness in the Fear of God, and thereby to arrive at the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ.

With this View also, it publishes the glad Tidings of Repentance and Remission of Sins, *i. e.* of Remission of Sins consequent upon Repentance or Return to our Duty. For such Encouragement, considering our
present

present Circumstances, is absolutely necessary for the Support of Religion and Virtue in the World: For as the present Weaknesses and Infirmities of human Nature render a State of sinless Perfection impossible, if no Method of Recovery were provided, nothing whereby an angry God could be appeased, What could induce Man, once conscious of having offended, ever to think of altering his Conduct, and returning to his Duty? For what should he get by it, since Justice is inexorable, and Judgment inevitable? Would not this Despair render them, as it does the infernal Spirits, fixed and obdurate in Rebellion?

But then as these Offers of Mercy, upon Repentance, are necessary to the Support of Religion and Virtue in the World; so the same Cause requires that that Repentance consist in real Reformation and Amendment: That it consists not in fair Words, not in strong Crying and Tears, not in vehement Promises and bitter Expressions, but in actual Return to Duty. For if any thing less than this were Repentance, then this Doctrine would give full Licence to all Manner of Wickedness and Vice; would let in Impiety like a Torrent, by thus reconciling future

Happiness with present Iniquity and Sensuality. If Christianity taught this; instead of destroying the Works of the Devil, it would further and promote them; instead of teaching them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, it would tempt them to be the Reverse of all this, and to commit all Uncleanneſs with Greedineſs. It would do more towards the corrupting of the World, than all its divine Precepts, all its glorious Promises, and tremendous Threats could do towards the reforming it.

Neither for this Reason; because it cannot in any Shape or Degree, contribute to encourage or make us easy in our Sins; every thing of that Nature being the most abhorrent to it. Neither for this Reason, I say, can its peculiar, its essential Doctrine, the Doctrine of the meritorious Death and Sacrifice of a Redeemer, have any Tendency to allay the Warmth, or slacken the Vigour of our Endeavours, after true and personal Reformation and Amendment.

Nothing is so common in the Mouths of Penitents, as the all-sufficient Merits of our Redeemer; and indeed no Wonder they should ever be uppermost in the Thoughts of
all

all that believe them; for they are the only Foundation of Hope, the only Anchor of the Soul, in the best and most circumspect among the Sons of Men. But it is to be feared, from the Manner of their being spoken of, that they are considered not as in Truth they are, Encouragements to Goodness, as crowning our *sincere* though *imperfect* Endeavours with Success; but as Arguments for superseding our Endeavours: So much being done on our Redeemer's Part, that nothing remains to be done on ours. But surely there cannot be a greater Misrepresentation of those Merits, nor a greater Abuse of them neither, than such Imagination:

Nothing can possibly be plainer, than that the Benefits of the Death of Christ are offered to us, not in absolute and general Terms, but under certain Limitations and Restrictions. Christianity is represented to us under the Notion of a Covenant; which in the Nature of it implies certain Things to be performed by each Party. The Sacrifice of Christ is God's Part; Obedience or Repentance at least is Man's; a Failure therefore on our Part, by the Nature of Covenants, vacates all Pretence and Title to the Engagements on God's; and

and to this Purpose is the whole Current of the New Testament, which never separates the Promises from the Conditions. Thus the first Preaching of Christianity is, Repent ye and believe the Gospel. The general Charge given by our Lord to his Disciples, on his leaving them, is, to go and preach Repentance and Remission of Sins, in his Name, among all Nations. And agreeable to these Instructions, we find by the History of his Apostles, that the Sum of their Preaching was, Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Interest in Christ does therefore manifestly depend upon our Compliance with his Terms.

And to suppose otherwise is also an Abuse of his Merits: For it is to represent him, the holy one, as a Friend to Wickedness and Vice, by thus purchasing for us a Licence to commit them; or at least as not an Enemy to them, by suffering his Followers to indulge in it, and by receiving them, however polluted by them, into his Favour. Such Supposition is an Affront, an Insult upon the Holiness and Purity of his Nature.

Alas! Little do they understand of Christianity who talk at that Rate.

Its

Its whole Design and Purpose is the Reverse of all this — By the Apostacy of the First *Adam*, Sin and Wickedness was let in upon the World; and quickly it swelled into a Torrent, overturning and confounding all Things; to abate these Overflowings of Iniquity, to rescue unhappy Man from the final and horrible Destruction, wherewith they threatened him; to restore and revive the Practice of Righteousness and Virtue, comes the Second *Adam* from Heaven. To this End, by Precept he instructs us; by Example he draws us: by Rewards he encourages; by Punishments he terrifies. By the Sacrifice of himself, he relieves us from the overbearing Load of past Offences — deters us from falling back, and encourages us to Newness of Life.

For the Sacrifice of Christ is not a greater Argument for Hope, than it is for Fear; for the Greatness of the Sacrifice does not more assure us, that, with him God will give the Obedient all Things; than it does, that the Rebellious shall by no Means flee the Wrath to come. For it, as the Apostle irresistibly argues, God spared not his own Son, when he stood only in the Place of Sinners,

Sinners, shall he spare us, spare the Sinners themselves?

Thus the Reformation of the World, in order to the Happiness of it, is the great Design of all that our Redeemer has done for us. It is the very Design of his Death and Sufferings, and therefore the Merits of that Death and Sufferings cannot be an Argument for the Neglect of it. And to make them serve such Purpose, is to abuse Mercy, and to trample upon Graciousness: To resist the Spirit of Grace, and to tread under Foot the Blood of the Covenant; even the Blood of the Son of God.

Such is the Necessity of actual Reformation and Amendment; such the Necessity of *Change* or Repentance. But to make it a religious Change or Repentance, we must add something more; for we may even cease to do Evil, and learn to do well, and yet have no Merit in it. To make such Change acceptable to God, we must be sure of our Principle of the Motives from which it flows, of the Grounds on which it is wrought — A Man may alter his Manner of Life from various and sundry Causes — From a Regard to his own Ease and Quiet — From a Regard

to

to his Honour and Reputation — From a
Regard to his Health and Estate — From a
Regard to worldly Preferment and Advance-
ment. But Changes brought about upon
such Reasons, will not, I imagine, be deemed
Repentance in a religious View. No; the
Stream must ever be as the Fountain from
whence it flows: And therefore religious
Repentance must proceed from religious Prin-
ciple; such are a Sense of Duty and a Love
of God. The religious Penitent, awakened
by the Terrors of the Lord, calls his Ways
to Remembrance; begins to think seriously
of the Danger of his Condition, of the Depth
of the Precipice on whose Edge he plays.
Upon Reflection, the Equity of the divine
Commands, the Greatness of the divine
Rewards, and the Immenfity of the divine
Love, present themselves to his View: And
to these, preffing upon him, fucceeds the
Baseness, the Unworthiness, the Ingratitude,
the Stupidity of his own past Behaviour; and
these are followed by *Remorse and Self-
Condemnation*; the Anguish and Torture of
which is so great, as to be thought itself to
constitute Hell: To fill the terrible Idea,
and

and to answer all that is conceived of it, everlasting Fire itself not excepted.

Thus pierced with a Sense of Guilt, and oppressed with Apprehension from an angry Omnipotence, the religious Penitent, as well may be supposed, gives Way ; and beginning to sink, cries out, Lord save me, I perish.

Nor does Heaven deny a friendly Hand ; more pleased, if possible, even than he, it gives it. Heaven quenches not the smoking Flax, nor breaks the bruised Reed. On the contrary, it binds up the broken Heart, and heals the contrite Spirit ; it pours Balm into its Wounds, and giveth Medicine to heal its Sickness : Infallible Cure for the bitterest of all Diseases, the Diseases of the Mind.

The Penitent thus humbled before, and flying, if possible, out of Existence, from his tremendous Presence ; God, I say, will by no Means leave comfortless : No ! He will come to him, Be of good Cheer (rise, he calleth thee,) thy Sins are forgiven thee. That Voice which but now shook the Earth and the Heavens, is become a Voice from Heaven, strengthening him. The Almighty proclaims himself the Lord God, merciful
and

and gracious, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression and Sin: He opens to him the Riches of his Grace, and makes all his Goodness pass before him.

The Penitent thus revived; and now, as it were, oppressed with Goodness; loving much, as he has been forgiven much; convinced that where Wickedness abounds, Grace does much more abound; satisfied, in short, that the Love of God is invincible; with Vigour and Alacrity he girds himself for the long-neglected Service, resolving to make up in *Diligence* what he has lost in *Time*, — and thus returned to his Senses, and entered into the Path of Life, under the Influence of these Principles and these Impressions, ever heightening and improving by the Grace of God; he endures unto the End, finishing his Course with Joy: And to keep him steady in that Course, (Alas! That human Infirmary requires it) having a constant Eye on Rewards and Punishments. — Such is the Change, and such the Principles, which constitute religious Repentance.

Fifthly. If these Words of the Prophet be a true Description of Repentance, then may we infer how little Dependence is to be
had

had on a Death-bed Repentance: How desperate is the Condition of those, who put off this great and necessary Work to the last Moment of their Lives. To cease to do Evil, and learn to do well, is in other Words, to break off evil Habits, and to contract good ones in their Room. — Now the Force of Habit or Custom is, in Scripture, pronounced almost invincible; the Difficulty of conquering it, being by a strong Figure compared to a natural Impossibility, even to the *Æthiopian's* changing his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots; and we ourselves are, by manifold Experience, so thoroughly convinced of it, that we say proverbially, Use is a second Nature.

We confess, we feel, that to get the better of Habits, Time and Labour are requisite: That our Way is slow and gradual, and that with the Exertion of all our Might, with the full and vigorous Exercise of all our Faculties, we are but just a Match for the Difficulty.

Is then so known a Difficulty to be trusted to a single Moment? And that the last Moment of our Lives too?

If

If it can be safely trusted to any one Moment; if our old Friends can be at once parted with; if the Vices we have, through a long Series of Years, been passionately fond of, can be at once discarded; if, in short, we can from Devils be in a Moment transformed into Angels of Light, then the Power of Habits is contrary to all Experience, mere Chimera.

But perhaps there is something peculiar in the last Moment of our Lives: Yes; so there is indeed, something very peculiar; and that is, a peculiar Weakness and Inability; a peculiar Failure of all the Faculties of Soul and Body; a peculiar Terror, Disorder, and Confusion. Whatever therefore is peculiar to this last Moment of our Lives, is peculiarly unfavourable to the difficult Work which is supposed to be done in it. It is indeed a Moment, to which Common Sense will not trust the slightest Affair: And what shall we then say of that Understanding, which is hardy enough to venture it with the most arduous and important of all Affairs.

But supposing that this Conquest of Habits; this ceasing to do Evil, and learning to do well, were not a Work of quite so much

Difficulty, and that it might be accomplished too in less Time than is imagined; yet there is another Reason, why no Man in his Senses would trust this Work to the *last* Period of his Life; and that is, because no Man, at that Time, can assuredly know, whether he has effectually done it or not. What he has done, is to be known by its Fruits: An After-Trial must determine the Nature of his present Performance; but none is here supposed to follow, and therefore the Matter must be left open.

Though therefore we should have Strength enough to conquer ourselves in the Hour of Death, and really work such a Change as would shew its Sincerity in Change of Manners, in After-life, were it indulged; yet as we cannot be satisfied of this, we must leave the World in all that Distraction of Mind, which must needs be the Attendant upon Doubt, in an Affair of infinite and everlasting Consequence.

And to increase our Doubt, to raise our Misgivings, to heighten our Distrust of ourselves, we have, alas! but too, too much Reason. The Heart of Man is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked,
who

who can know it? Desperately attached to Wickedness and Vice, and is exceedingly artful in its Workings, making plausible Feints of parting with its Favourites, but all the while by no means intending it.

We have besides Experience to confirm our Suspicion; sick Men's Vows being almost proverbial, for Things of no Sincerity, Stability, or Dependance — Surely the Bitterness of Death is past — Is it so? So past as never to return? Alas! It is but a Reprieve; a Respite of Execution; which shall be light or heavy by Delay, according to the Use or Abuse of the Interval.

Lastly. To take the Prophet's Advice; to cease to do Evil, and learn to do well, the same Prophet encourages us, by assuring us of the Success of it; of the happy Event and Consequence; for thus he proceeds: "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord;" (thus the Almighty condescends, as it were, to appeal to our Judgment for the Equity of his Proceedings) "though your Sins be as scarlet; they shall be white as Snow; though they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wool." If we do but turn from our evil Ways, and

for the Time to come, do that which is lawful and right, we shall save our Souls alive. All the Wickedness that we have formerly done, shall not be once named unto us, but in the Righteousness which we now do, in it shall we live. And, O House of *Israel*, Are not these Ways equal? Can this Procedure be objected to? Is it not, on the contrary, full fraught with Mercy and Goodness, and every thing we should expect from the Deity?

But — To cease to do Evil, and to learn to do well — Difficult Work! — Reluctant Flesh and Blood! — Be it so. But does everlasting Happiness deserve no Pains? Can you imagine Heaven should be a cheap Purchase? Surely, no Commandment can be grievous; no Mortification irksome; no Suffering heavy; surely all must be well bestowed, when we reflect that it is the Price of an eternal and exceeding Weight of Glory.

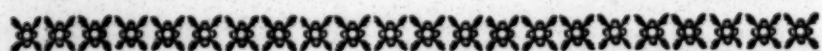
Return then: — Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee — Return — And our gracious Redeemer will consider you, as never having departed; as having *ever* been good and faithful Servants; and as such will bid you welcome into the Joy of your Lord.

S E R M O N



S E R M O N X.

*The Comforts of a good, and
Terrors of a bad Conscience.*



PROV. xviii. 14.

*The Spirit of a Man will sustain his
Infirmity; but a wounded Spirit
who can bear?*



HE plain Meaning of these Words
is this: That the Spirit or Mind
of Man, by its natural Firmness
and Resolution, is able to sustain
and triumph over all the Evils, (of what
Kind soever they be) which can befall him;

but that, if the Spirit or Mind be itself wounded, and in consequence its Force injured and abated; that then the Condition of the Man is insupportably miserable; that while the Mind is untouched, the Man is impregnable;—but that if he be wounded there, his Misery is insufferable: That a clear and sound Mind has something to oppose to the heaviest Calamities; something which will take off their Edge, and make them sit easy upon it; but that if the Mind be touched; if the Spirit be wounded, such a Condition is inconsolable and intolerable: Now as nothing can be supposed to contribute equally to Vigour and Strength of Mind as Innocence; as attended with a Conviction, that happen what will, it must be well with it in the End—And as nothing so weakens and sinks the Mind, wounds it so deeply, as a Sense of Guilt; I imagine I may fairly substitute a good and bad Conscience in the room of a sound and wounded Spirit; and proceed to shew how from the former flows Happiness incapable of Destruction, and from the other, Misery incapable of being either *endured* or *relieved*; for the Word *bear* may be taken in *both* Senses.

It shall then be the Business of this Discourse to illustrate the Truth of this Observation of the wise Man; and to shew you,

First. , That a good Conscience is sufficient to bear us up under the heaviest Pressures; and to make us triumph over the most terrible Evils that can befall us — The Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmary. And

Secondly. That the Condition of him who has a bad Conscience is the most absolutely and compleatly miserable; that it is inconsolable and insupportable. A wounded Spirit who can bear?

And First. A good Conscience is sufficient to make us bear up under the heaviest Pressures, and to make us triumph over the most terrible Evils that can befall us. The Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmary. Now the exceeding great Happiness of a good Conscience consists in this; that he who is blessed with it, has

First. The Approbation of his own Mind; and

Secondly. Confidence towards God.

First. He who has a good Conscience, has the Approbation of his own Mind; and this Approbation of our own Minds is

absolutely necessary to our Happiness; for however our Conduct may be approved by others, though all Mankind should unite in applauding and commending our Behaviour; unless we have our own Approbation, we cannot be satisfied: And he who has that, is satisfied in and from himself. "Happy is he" (says the Apostle) who condemneth not "himself in that Thing which he alloweth;" (*i. e.*) who practises nothing but what he approves: Happy upon many Accounts he is, and particularly upon this, that he is pleased and satisfied with his own Conduct. He is sensible of having always acted up to the Judgment of his Mind, and in that Reflection takes infinite Delight; for nothing can be more unworthy of, nor uneasy to a reasonable Creature, than to act in Contradiction to his Reason and his Judgment. If we approve the Things that are excellent, it is our Happiness to practise them; for it is our Happiness to practise what we approve. It was upon this Account that Virtue was wont to be deemed its own Reward: The Sense of having done what we approved, being thought an abundant Recompence for all the Trouble and Difficulty of doing it.

The

The Pleasure resulting from the Sense of having acted suitably to the Dignity of our Nature, and to the Obligations which, as reasonable Creatures, we are under, being thought more than an Equivalent for all the Pain and Misery, which this steady Adherence to what was right, might occasionally bring upon us. This Approbation of our own Conduct, this Consciousness of having acted as it is fit and reasonable we should act, makes us ever pleased and in good Humour with ourselves : This is a continual Feast, an inexhaustible Fund of Comfort and Delight.

But secondly. He who is blessed with a good Conscience, has not only the Approbation of his own Mind, but (what is infinitely more) he has Confidence towards God : He has the Approbation of the supreme Mind. He is not only satisfied himself with his Conduct, but he reflects likewise, that it is observed and approved by the great Sovereign of the Universe ; and the Consequence of the divine Approbation, he knows to be an exceeding great Recompence of Reward ; for what the Almighty approves, he cannot but reward. If therefore, the bare Satisfaction, which results from the Con-
sciousness

sciouſneſs of having done what is right, be not alone ſufficient to bear him out in the uniform Practice of Virtue (as undoubtedly it is not) yet this further Conſideration, that Virtue is approved, and conſequently will be rewarded by our great Judge, is abundantly ſufficient for that Purpoſe. By keeping the Recompence of the Reward in View, he overlooks all the Difficulties in his Way to it. He knows, that if upon a fair and impartial Search into his Life and Actions, he can ſay to himſelf, Well done! good and faithful Servant, that this Sentence will be ratified in Heaven; and that the Conſequence of that will be an Entrance into the Joy of his Lord. He knows that if he can ſincerely ſpeak Peace to himſelf here, he may ſecurely promiſe himſelf Happineſs hereafter. He knows that if his Heart condemns him not, that neither will God condemn him. And from hence ſprings his Confidence towards God, as having ſecured an Intereſt in him, and made him his Friend: He therefore fears no Evil, but reſts ſatiſfied and ſecure, that all Things ſhall work together for his Good.

He therefore who has a good Conſcience (carrying this double Source of Happineſs
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about him, the Approbation of his own Mind, and the full Assurance of the divine Favour, cannot be miserable, place him in what Circumstances you please. His Spirit thus supported, will be abundantly able to sustain his Infirmary, of what Kind or Degree soever it be. Thus strengthened in the inner Man, he will be able to bear up under any external Pressures, and to defeat every thing which shall assault him from without. In the Midst of all the Sorrows which can surround him, the Comforts of a good Conscience will refresh his Soul. In all his Tribulations his Rejoicing will be this, the Testimony of his Conscience.

For, is he in Poverty and Adversity? his good Conscience will supply him with many and effectual Arguments, to make his Wants sit light and easy upon him. He can comfort himself with this Reflection, that his Poverty is not owing to himself; that it is not his Idleness, his Luxury, or Extravagance that has brought him into Distress: He can therefore acquit himself in this Particular, nor is he conscious of any other extraordinary Iniquity. On the contrary, he is sensible, that, making the proper Abatements for
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human Infirmary, he has clean Hands and a pure Heart: He therefore rests assured, that the Almighty does not afflict him in Wrath; but in Faithfulness, in Goodness, and in Mercy. Nothing can make Adversity truly miserable, but an Apprehension of its being an Indication of the divine Displeasure; but he who has a good Conscience, can never suspect it to be so to him. He must consider it just in the contrary Light; as a Mark of the divine Love and Favour. No Wonder therefore, if he even rejoices in Tribulations: He knows that there may be many wise and good Reasons to afflict him: He may be afflicted perhaps by way of tenderest Correction; or perhaps he is afflicted in order to improve and illustrate his Virtue; or, it may be, Prosperity would prove fatal to his Virtue, and would make Shipwreck of that good Conscience, which at present, he is so happy in. But whatever be the particular Reason for which Providence afflicts him; this he rests secure in, that the ultimate Design of all, is his Good: For being conscious of the Uprightness of his Ways, he has this Confidence towards God. And not only so, but he has this further Confidence still, that
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when these light and momentary Afflictions shall have an End; his Patience, his Uprightness, and his Integrity shall be rewarded, with an exceeding great and eternal Weight of Glory.

Again. Is the Man of good Conscience vilified and despised? Does he suffer in one of the tenderest Points, his good Name and Reputation? Is he reviled, and reproached, and represented in the falsest and blackest Colours? In short, Is the just, upright Man laughed to Scorn? It may be so: But then to such a Person, all these Calumnies and Reproaches are pointless. He examines into his own Heart, and if he finds that does not reproach him, he fears not the Reproach of Men, neither regards he their Revilings: He knows he has the Praise of God, and that is surely sufficient to make him bear up under all the Calumny and Dispraise of Man. And if, in consequence of the Contempt he is held in, he is abandoned and deserted by his Neighbour, and all Men separate themselves from his Company; he can retire, with infinite Satisfaction, into himself; and from reflecting upon his Innocence and his well-grounded Assurance of the divine Favour, feel

feel a more sincere and exalted Pleasure, than the most agreeable Company could afford him: Nay, instead of fearing, he courts Solitude, which gives him Opportunity to enjoy his Virtue.

Again. No Disappointment can disturb the Calm and Serenity of his Mind: If his wisest and best-projected Schemes should fail him; yet one Thing he is sure of, that his Virtue shall in no wise lose its Reward. He comforts himself therefore with this Reflection, that come what will of his worldly Projects, he cannot miss of the Happiness he promises himself hereafter: For those Hopes of Happiness which are founded on Virtue, are founded on a Rock, on a fixed and unshaken Foundation; a Foundation which can never fail us, nor deceive us.

But further; The Man of a good Conscience is unmoved at any evil Tidings. The Righteous is bold as a Lion, (says *Solomon*.) An absolute Stranger to Fear of any Kind: He knows but of one Thing that is truly fearful; the Wrath of God: And against that Fear he has wisely provided, for he has secured his Love. His Heart standeth fast in the Consciousness of his Virtue, and therefore

fore he believeth in the Lord, that he will surely deliver him in the Time of Trouble. He cannot therefore fear, though the Earth be moved, and though the Hills be carried into the midst of the Sea; though the Waters thereof rage and swell, and though the Mountains shake at the Tempest of the same. He is not afraid of the Pestilence that walketh in Darkness, nor of the Arrow that destroyeth at Noon-day: Though Thousands fall before him, and Ten Thousands at his Right Hand, yet fearless and undaunted he stands, trusting in the Lord, and staying upon his God.

But lastly. The Man of a good Conscience is prepared against the Hour of Death. This is the severest Trial of human Nature; at this Juncture we stand in need of all the Succours we can raise. To sustain this Trial, with Courage and Equanimity, the Spirit of Man had need of the Support of a good Conscience: And this indeed is equal to the Task; it alone can refresh us in this Hour of Distress. A good Conscience will disarm even this King of Terrors: It will in Triumph ask him, O Death! where is thy Sting, O Grave! where is thy Victory?

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He who is conscious of a well-spent Life; of having acted through the whole Course of it, according to the Rules of Reason and Religion, will now at the Close of it, look back with infinite Complacency; and having reflected upon his past Life, and found it fair, he will thenceforth look forward to the Reward of his Righteousness. The sure and immediate Prospect of inconceivable Happiness, now employs all his Faculties: He sees Heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God, ready to receive him into the Joy of his Lord. He looks upon Death, not as the hard Condition, but as the Happiness of his Nature; as a Retreat from the Burthen and Heat of the Day; a Repose from a vexatious and troublesome World; as putting a Period to the Struggles between the Flesh and the Spirit, and as an Entrance upon the infinite and eternal Recompence of Virtue. He therefore is so far from shrinking at the Apprehensions of Death, that he even longs to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. For since upon fair Examination of his Life and Actions, he can truly say, I have fought a good Fight, I have finished

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my Course, I have kept the Faith; he does not doubt, but that upon his Dissolution, he shall receive the Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge hath prepared for all those, who by patient Continuance in Well doing, have sought for Glory and Immortality.

Thus have we seen the Force of a good Conscience in the severest Trials and Calamities we are subject to; and we have seen that it is invincible. It is Proof against every thing that can befall us: Its Happiness is liable to no Accidents; it is independent of every thing without; for no Adversity, no Reproach, no Disappointments, no Terror, not even that of Death itself, can affect it; it is satisfied from itself, and stays upon its God. A good Conscience seems to be a Friend which is born for Adversity: In Adversity we feel its Comforts in a peculiar Manner; it is the Medicine of Life; a Medicine which will heal all its Wounds; which will make every thing that is grievous in it, fit light and easy upon us: It is like the hungry Soul to which every bitter Thing is sweet.

Having thus shewn you, that a good Conscience is sufficient to make us bear up under the heaviest Pressures, and to make us triumph over the greatest Evils that can befall us; it will be no difficult Matter to make out in the

Second Place, That the Condition of him who has a bad Conscience, is the most absolutely and compleatly miserable; that it is inconsolable and insupportable: A wounded Spirit who can bear?

Now as the exceeding great Happiness of a good Conscience consists in this; that he who enjoys it, has both the Approbation of his own Mind, and Confidence towards God; the excessive Misery of a bad one must therefore lie in this, that he who is tormented with it, is

First, Self-condemned. And

Secondly, Under perpetual and strong Apprehensions of the divine Wrath. And

First. He who has a bad Conscience is self-condemned. He condemneth himself in that Thing which he alloweth; he practises what he disapproves; the Good that he would, that he acknowledges he should do;
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he does not : And the Evil that he would not, that he confesses he should not do, that he does. He sees and approves the Things that are excellent, and yet deliberately and upon Reflection chuses the direct contrary; he acts in open Contradiction to his Reason and Judgment, than which, (as I have already observed) nothing can be more unworthy of, nor uneasy to, a reasonable Being. He sees the Obligations which, as a rational Creature, he is under, and acknowledges the Equity of them, and yet acts in direct Opposition to them. He therefore must be ever displeased, finding Fault, and out of Humour with himself. He sees nothing in himself, but what he disapproves; and therefore he must in the strictest Sense hate and abhor himself.

But secondly. He, who has a bad Conscience, does not only live in a State of Self-condemnation, but also under perpetual and strong Apprehensions of the divine Wrath. He condemns himself, and he knows that God will condemn him too. He has the Sentence of Death in himself, and he lives expecting and dreading the Execution of it. He is miserable indeed in his own Dislike

and Disapprobation of himself; but that is little in Comparison with the divine Displeasure, which will be surely attended with an immense and eternal Punishment. He knows, that by his Life and Actions he has offended him, who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity with Approbation; and who will therefore by no Means clear those that are guilty of it: He lives therefore under the strongest Apprehensions of the divine Wrath; under a sure and certain Dread and Expectation of Punishment, which, he knows not, how soon, and how heavily, it may fall upon him. And can there be Misery greater than this Fear of it? It is not perhaps much inferior to the actual Suffering of it?

Can then the Man who has an evil Conscience; he who carries this double Source of Misery about him, be happy in any Circumstances or Condition of Life? By no Means; as he who has a good Conscience cannot be miserable by any Adversity, so neither, on the other hand, can he who has a bad one, be made happy by any Prosperity.

It is not in the Power of any Wealth, or Riches, or Grandeur, to make him easy; these

these do but render him a splendid Wretch; these cannot silence his Conscience, which is neither to be bought off with Riches, nor awed by Power. In 'the Judgment of the World, which is formed only upon outward Appearances, he may perhaps be counted of all Men most happy; but did we feel the same secret and severe Lashes of Conscience that he does, we would soon change our Sentiments, and prefer to all his Wealth and Grandeur, the lowest and the humblest Poverty, with Innocence and a good Conscience.

Is he flattered and complimented? And do all Men speak well of him? Whilst his own Heart reproves him, all these are insignificant to his Happiness: They rather indeed sharpen and embitter the Reproaches of his own Mind; he regards them as so many Rebukes; as telling him, not what he is, but what he should be.

Is he courted and caressed, and by all Men sought after? However for a Time he may stifle his Conscience by Company and various Amusements; yet some Intervals from these he must have, and then his Conscience revives with redoubled Fury, and he is of all Men most miserable.

Does every thing look safe and secure about him : And is there in Truth no Danger nigh ? 'Tis his peculiar Misfortune to fear, where no Fear is ; and to flee when no Man pursueth.

Is he of a strong, sound and healthful Constitution ; and may he therefore promise himself Length of Days ? No ; he cannot do it ; knowing he deserves Death he daily expects and dreads it, and may therefore be very properly said to die daily.

No temporal Enjoyments can then make him happy. He is incapable of Delight from any thing in Nature ; he is like the full Soul which loatheth an Honeycomb ; he has no Relish for the sweetest Enjoyments ; every thing is distasteful to his vitiated Palate ; all Nature sickens about him : And as Melancholy and Despair have filled his Imagination, every thing appears to him in dark and gloomy Colours.

If then he who has a bad Conscience be so miserable in Prosperity, in the full Possession of all temporal Goods ; he must surely be doubly miserable in Adversity : The Cup of Affliction bitter enough naturally and in itself, is now poisoned with fresh Ingredients.

redients. Is he in Adversity? 'Tis the just Punishment of his Crimes; if he meets with Reproaches, his own Heart seconds them, and bears Witness to the Truth of them. If he is rejected and forsaken of Men, he has no Refuge; for being a Terror and a Burthen to himself, he of all Things most flies and avoids himself. And when the Hour of Death approaches, he is utterly destitute, afflicted, and tormented. He is exposed and given up to this King of Terrors, who sets himself in Array against him in his full Horror. Reflection upon the Wickedness of his past Life makes his End bitter as Wormwood, sharp as a two-edged Sword: He now considers himself as entering upon that Misery which he has so long dreaded: As going to suffer the Execution of that Sentence which he had long ago pronounced upon himself; as going to receive the Punishment of that Wickedness which all his Life-time he had been practising and condemning.

A wounded Spirit who then can bear? The Spirit of a Man may indeed sustain his Infirmary, of what Kind soever it be; but an evil Conscience is insupportable. Every other Affliction admits of Comfort and Relief;

but an evil Conscience is inconsolable and insupportable.

Who then would part with the invaluable Treasure of a good Conscience, for the Sake of any worldly Happiness whatsoever? Tho' the whole World should be given us in Exchange for it, we should yet be infinite Losers by the Bargain. It cannot be valued with the Gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx, or the Sapphire. The Gold and the Crystal cannot equal it; and the Exchange of it shall not be for Jewels of fine Gold. No Mention need be made of Coral or Pearls; for its Price is above Rubies. The Topaz of *Æthiopia* shall not equal it; neither shall it be valued with pure Gold. Nothing therefore can countervail a good Conscience, for its Excellency is invaluable.

Let us therefore be infinitely fearful of losing this inestimable Treasure: Let us not barter it away for Trifles; but rather let us sell all that we have, part with every thing, to purchase this one Pearl of great Price.

Let us be infinitely fearful of wounding the Spirit, as well knowing that its Wounds are not easily healed. They will, on every Occasion, be apt to bleed afresh; the Remembrance

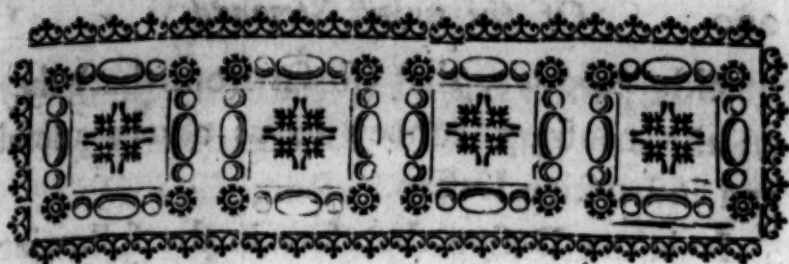
membrance of them will be always grievous unto us; the Burden of them will be intolerable.

But however let not those who are in these deplorable Circumstances, give themselves over — For there is yet Balm in *Gilead*: Let them hasten to the great Physician of Souls; and he will pour Balm into their Wounds, and give them Medicine to heal their Sickness. Let them come to him with bleeding Hearts; with Hearts pierced through and through with many Sorrows; let them turn to him with true and hearty Repentance, and bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance; and he, *gracious as powerful*, will blot out as a thick Cloud their Transgressions, and as a Cloud their Sins: Then shall their Sins, though they be as Scarlet, become white as Snow; though they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wool. But still is it not infinitely preferable to need not this Repentance? To the *Bitterness* of Repentance who would expose himself? And *bitter* it must be, before it can be accepted: For the *penitent* Heart must be a *contrite* Heart, *i.e.* a Heart *beaten and ground* as it were to Powder. And severe as the Remedy is, it may possibly be

be not always within our Reach ; for a long Course of sinning may harden and sear the Conscience, and thereby render it incapable of Repentance — And where there is no Repentance, there *can* be no Forgiveness. — Have a Care therefore of pushing Matters too far from this Confidence in Repentance. To make this clear in a very easy and familiar Way — Would any Man in his Wits wound himself, or quietly submit to be wounded, because he may be *cured*? — Is the *Smart* of the Cure of no Moment? And after all, perhaps, the Cure may not be so certain, as he imagined ; for it is possible the Constitution may be so far gone ; may be so thoroughly and intrinsically vitiated and corrupted, as to admit of *no Cure*.

The Rule of Conduct then, resulting from this Discourse, is plainly this : — To take infinite Care to keep always a Conscience void of Offence both towards God and towards Man.

S E R M O N.



S E R M O N XI.

Of the unjust Steward.



St. LUKE xvi. 8.

And the Lord commended the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely; for the Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.

 HOUGH these Words may possibly at first Sight appear surprizing, as seeming to carry in them some Sort of Commendation of Injustice, yet by the Help of a very little Attention, we may quickly

quickly perceive, that (so far from that) they on the contrary convey to us a very useful and instructive Lesson.

It is my Design therefore in the following Discourse

First. To open to you the true Intent and Meaning of this Passage. And,

Secondly. To enforce the Doctrine of it upon your Practice.

And First. These Words are Part of a Parable; let us then see what the Parable is, and what the Moral, which it is designed to teach us. The Parable begins the Chapter thus — “ There was a certain rich Man
“ which had a Steward, and the same was
“ accused unto him, that he had wasted his
“ Goods. And he called him, and said unto
“ him, How is it, that I hear this of thee?
“ Give an Account of thy Stewardship, for
“ thou mayest be no longer Steward: Then
“ the Steward said within himself, What
“ shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from
“ me the Stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg,
“ I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do,
“ that when I am put out of my Stewardship,
“ they may receive me into their Houses.
“ So he called every one of his Lord’s
“ Debtors

“Debtors unto him, and said unto the first,
“How much owest thou unto my Lord?
“And he said, an hundred Measures of Oil;
“and he said unto him, take thy Bill, and
“sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then
“said he to another, And how much owest
“thou? And he said, an hundred Measures
“of Wheat; and he said unto him, take thy
“Bill, and write fourscore. And the Lord
“commended the unjust Steward, because
“he had done wisely? for the Children of
“this World are in their Generation wiser
“than the Children of Light.” — We have
in this Parable represented to us, a Tran-
saction between a Master and his corrupt and
unfaithful Servant. The Report of the Ser-
vant’s Dishonesty reaching at last his Master’s
Ears, he resolves, like all prudent Men, to
call him to an Account, and dismiss him his
Service. Upon this, the Servant perceiving
himself to be in evil Case, unknowing how
to procure a Subsistence, when he should be
deprived of his Employment; after much
anxious Consideration, finds out at length a
Method. He determines to secure his own
future Maintenance by a new Piece of In-
justice; which was this: Before he makes
up

up his Accounts, he calls to him his Master's Debtors, and inquiring into what they respectively owed, forgave each of them a good Part of their Debt: For by this Method (says he) I shall procure the Favour and Good-will of these Persons; I shall lay an Obligation upon them to take care of me in my future Distress: In point of Gratitude they will think it incumbent on them, to receive me into their Houses, when I am turned out of my Master's. It is true indeed, this is dealing very unfaithfully by my Master, but that weighs not with me. It is not his Interest, but my own, that I am now consulting. Let him look to himself, and so will I. If he will no longer maintain me, I will be so prudent as to take care that others shall. His Master coming to the Knowledge of this Conduct of his Servant, could not help acknowledging, that it was a very cunning and subtle Artifice: He commended the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely. As if he had said, His Behaviour is dishonest indeed, but truly it must be confessed to be *wise*. He wanted a future Provision, and it must be owned that he has taken a very effectual Method to secure one. — Well! But still,

still, how can the Wisdom of this unjust Servant be commended? Does Cunning alter the Nature of Fraud? Is prudent Injustice commendable? And is it only the dull Knave that is faulty? No such Thing: The Dishonesty of the Affair is quite out of the Question; it is the Wisdom of it only which is insisted on. And that it is so, appears plainly from the Application which our Saviour makes of the Parable: For upon the Master's commending the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely *, he makes this Observation: — The Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light. — By the Children of this World, are always understood, — worldly-minded Men; Men, who regardless of another World, are busied only about this — And Children of Light, is the usual Scripture-Expression, for pious, good, and well-meaning Persons — The Assertion then of our Saviour is this: That we act much more like wise Men with regard to our temporal Concerns, than we do with regard to our eternal: That

* It is not our blessed Lord that commends him, but it is the Man's Lord or Master; and upon that our Lord makes the Observation.

worldly-

worldly-minded Men are exceedingly more wise in their Management of the Affairs of this World, than the Generality even of well-meaning Men are in the Business of the next. That the Conduct of the former may be an Example to the latter, in point both of Sagacity and Industry. Of Sagacity, in discovering the likeliest Methods of obtaining their Ends; of Industry, in the Use of them.

First. It is not then the Injustice, but the Wisdom of this Steward which is proposed for our Imitation. It is not said, that he was commended because he did *unjustly*, but because he did *wisely*: Neither is the *Iniquity* of the *Fraud* at all palliated by the *Cunning* of the *Contrivance*. No! the Dishonesty is the same still; equally wicked, equally offensive to God, whether artful or otherwise. But then the Wisdom of the Steward must at the same Time be allowed; and in this alone is he our Example. He pursued his End, by wicked Means indeed, which we should abhor; but however by effectual Means, which we should imitate. — The great End which the Children of this World have in View, is temporal Happiness and Prosperity: This Way they bend
all

all their Thoughts: In this one Point terminate all their Views: In Pursuit of this they rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness: For this no Pains are spared: In this great Cause all the Faculties both of Mind and Body are exerted. They are ever setting their Wits at Work, to find out the likeliest Means of attaining it; and when they are found out, they never fail to use the utmost Diligence and Industry in the Application of them. And herein indeed are the Children of this World a very useful Example for the Children of Light. It is evident that there is not the same Care and Industry employed about the next World, that there is about this. No Man's Knowledge either of himself or of the World will permit him to imagine it. Even the Children of Light, even good and well-meaning Men, are but too often very cold and negligent in what they confess should be their great Concern. Do the Children of this World behave so with regard to their temporal Interests? most assuredly they do not. Learn Wisdom then even from them: They who deserve the utmost Abhorrence and Detestation in some Respects, may yet be as

deserving of Imitation in others. And this is the Case of the Children of this World. The End which they propose to themselves is bad; the Means by which they pursue it are likewise bad. In both these Respects therefore, instead of being copied after, they are to be detested. But then their indefatigable Pains and Application are commendable; their Care and Sollicitude about the Attainment of what they conceive to be the most desirable End, is highly worthy of Imitation. In this one Instance they are rational and consistent; in that having once fixed upon an End, they wisely and diligently pursue it. In this they are an Example, and therefore a Reproach to the Children of Light; surely an infinite Reproach: For shall the Children of this World outdo the Children of Light in Industry and Application? — The End which the Children of Light propose is a good End, nay the very best of Ends: The Means to the Attainment of this End, are of the same Nature, good likewise. In this then the Children of Light have the Advantage; here indeed their Wisdom shines out superior; but when they come to the Application, to the Use of these Means;

Means; when they come to *Practice*, here they fall short, and meanly yield to the Children of the World.

Of great Importance then is the Moral of this Parable; excellent is its Instruction. It means to reprove and correct our Negligence and Supineness, with regard to our eternal Interest; it reproaches us for the Languidness of our Endeavours this Way. To our infinite Confusion, it proposes the Conduct, even of worldly Men, to our Imitation. It mortifies us, by shewing us, that wicked Men take more Pains to obtain an evil, or at most a very contemptible End, than good Men do to secure the best of Ends. In this Respect it is, that the Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light, — nor can it ever be supposed, that Men should take Occasion, from this Commendation of the unjust Steward, to copy his *Disbonesty* as well as his *Wisdom*, for this plain Reason; that we all very well know that a good End is not to be pursued by bad Means; we know that Evil is not to be done that Good may come. The Prospect of the greatest imaginable Good will not

justify the least imaginable Wickedness in the Methods of coming at it. Religious Purposes can never be attempted by irreligious Steps. Now Religion and its necessary Consequence, our own everlasting Happiness, are the Ends this Parable would recommend to us; — And these Ends it is manifest, are utterly unattainable by any other than good and virtuous Means. No indirect Means can therefore possibly be here approved; No! the unjust Steward is not here applauded either for the Choice of his End, or of his Means, but (as I have before shewn) only for his wise Use and steady Application of the most effectual Means for the Attainment of what was in his Judgment, (though wrong) the most desirable End.

Having thus opened to you the true Intent and Meaning of the Words of the Text, I proceed in the second Place, to enforce the Doctrine of them upon your Practice.

It appears from what has been said, that what the Parable would recommend to us, is Diligence and Industry in the Pursuit of everlasting Happiness in the World to come: And that it means to reproach us with the
wiser

wiser Conduct of worldly Men, who spare no Pains to accomplish their great End, temporal Happiness and Prosperity.

Now according to the common Rules of Prudence, our Diligence and Industry should always bear Proportion to the Value of the Thing we are in Pursuit of. All Things are not equally deserving of our Care; and nicely to weigh the Nature of Things, and carefully to examine into their different Degrees of Merit, and to adjust to each Degree of Merit a suitable Proportion of Concern and Application, is the proper Business and Perfection of Wisdom. And it is in this that the Children of Light are faulty, that they do not bestow Labour and Pains adequate to the Value of the Thing they are in quest of. And in this Respect it is, that the Children of the World may set them an Example, that they are by no Means wanting in Application; in the Application of every thing in their Power, towards the Attainment of their great End. They can with no Sort of Propriety be accused of Indolence or Remissness in this Affair; on the contrary, they even exceed in Industry: They over-do; they bestow a great deal more Pains, than

the End in View is worthy of. The Children of Light would do well to copy their indefatigable Diligence; and keeping still their own End, only to change Degrees of Application with them.

If any thing can spur us on and quicken our Endeavours, it must be, as I have before observed, the Value and Excellence of the Object in View. In order therefore to enforce the Doctrine of the Text, it will be necessary to compare together the Ends of the Children of Light and the Children of the World; to examine into their different Merits; and, by that Means, to see how just and severe a Reproach it is to the former, to be outdone in Diligence by the latter.

The End of the one, is the Salvation of their Souls; their everlasting Happiness in the Life to come: That of the other, only their Ease and Well-being in this Life; temporal Happiness and Prosperity. Now between these Ends were there no other Difference than this, that the one is permanent, the other transient; the one temporal, the other eternal; yet this alone would be infinitely sufficient to entitle the former to the greater Diligence and Application: For
let

let the Happiness of this present World be supposed ever so great, and of Continuance ever so long, so it be but short of eternal, and it will admit of no Comparison with an everlasting Inheritance. It was the Saying of a Philosopher*, That every thing is short, which is not eternal. Every thing certainly is so, if compared with what is eternal.

Besides; the Reflection that our Happiness is some time or other to have an End, is enough to damp the greatest Delights; for when that Time comes, they are to us as though they had never been. And this melancholy Prospect of the Deprivation of our Pleasures spoils the present Enjoyment of them. This is the Case, if together with our Pleasures we should be destroyed also: But if (as in Truth it will be) our Pleasures only shall be taken away, and we still continue sensible Beings, then shall we be also sensible of our Loss. We shall then be just so much the worse for our past Enjoyments: For it is more eligible never to be happy, than having once enjoyed Happiness, to be deprived of it; for we cannot repine at the

* *Breve est quicquid non est æternum.* Cicero.

Absence of Pleasures we are ignorant of; No; but the Misery is to give up known and experienced Pleasures; to be permitted to revel in them for a while, and then compelled to part with them for ever. Let then the Pleasures of this Life have all the Concessions made to them that can be desired; let them be allowed to be as great as the most abandoned Voluptuary can imagine them, yet still they are finite, they have an End; they will one Day leave us, and forsake us: And leave us too in a much worse Condition than they found us. But were it not so, yet they are gone; like Vapours they appeared for a little while, and then vanished away; And then if we are not the worse, neither are we the better for them.

Eternal therefore admits of no Comparison; every thing *finite* is truly contemptible and absolutely unworthy even of our least and lowest Regard, if set in Opposition to what is eternal.

And as an everlasting Happiness is superior to all temporary Enjoyments however pleasing for the Time; so likewise is an everlasting Misery more to be dreaded than any other however sharp and severe, during its Continuance.

tinuance. The Circumstance of Eternity increases Misery as much as it does Happiness. It makes the one as terrible, as it makes the other desirable. Be therefore the present Misery of Poverty and Want; of Ignominy and Contempt ever so great. Suffer what we will in Life; though all the Evils of it, heaped up together, should burst upon our Heads, yet all this would fall infinitely short of an everlasting Misery. And therefore he who to avoid any present Evil, shall expose himself to the Evil to come, is of all Creatures most foolish and most miserable.

But besides this Circumstance of Eternity, there is no Comparison between the Happiness of this World and of that which is to come, either in Kind or Degree. It is an *exceeding*, as well as an *eternal* Weight of Glory. Were the Happiness of both Worlds of equal Continuance, yet they differ enough to exclude all Comparison. The Truth is, the Happiness of the World to come, exceeds the greatest possible Happiness of this, as much in intrinsic Worth and Excellence, as it does in Duration — And so likewise for the Miseries of the two States. They differ so much in their Natures, that they could
admit

admit of no Comparison, even though they were to be of equal Continuance.

Such are the different Ends of the Children of Light, and of the Children of the World. And if such be the Difference between them, which is most deserving of our Care and Application? Judge ye what I say! If you will at all reflect, ye cannot help knowing what is right: You cannot possibly hesitate in your Choice of the End; and if that be once fixed, it should seem as impossible for you to be guilty of Negligence and Remissness in the Pursuit of it. It should seem indeed to be more impossible; for it is a much less Instance of Weakness and Folly to make a wrong Choice of an End; than having made one, to be careless as to the Attainment of it. This is of all others the most absurd and irrational Conduct; and that for this plain Reason, that it is the Part which is most in our Power.

Shall we then turn our Eyes into the World, and see how Men commonly behave in this Particular? We may reasonably expect to find, nothing sought after with equal Vehemence and Ardour, as everlasting Happiness. We may expect to find them *heartily*
busied

bused in nothing but the Salvation of their Souls. True! Reason indeed would teach us to expect this; but sad Experience proclaims the contrary: For upon a Survey of Mankind, we see, that the Salvation of their Souls is so far from being the principal Concern, that it is almost the only Affair that is neglected. We see them wholly engrossed by the Things of this World; divided between the Business and the Pleasure of it; And with these either so employed or so entertained, as to leave no Room for the momentous Business of the next: They consume their Days as if in this Life only, they had Hope; as if in Truth, they were *sure* there was no Eternity to follow. They live, I say, as if they were sure there was no Eternity, at the same Time that they believe that there is one; (for the Generality even of wicked Men are yet persuaded of this Truth; the Evidences of a future State being so glaring, that even the Reprobate cannot so far conquer their Understandings, as to resist them.) Nay even those who go a Step farther than this; even they who not only believe a future State, but are in Truth solicitous about it; they, I say, often behave in such a Manner,
so

so far forget themselves, that were we to judge by their Actions, we should imagine that they had never so much as heard, whether there was any future State. One shall go to his Farm, and another to his Merchandize; all are so employed in the Affairs of the present State, that they must of Necessity postpone those of the next. Our eternal Concerns shall be forced to give Way to the most indifferent of our temporal ones; Everlasting Happiness shall be risqued for an Amusement; for, the Sake of the most insignificant Trifle, we will make it a Question, whether we shall be happy or miserable to all Eternity.

Do worldly Men act after this Manner? Do they thus run the Hazard of their Fortunes? No! they have more Prudence; Would to God they would let this their Prudence carry them through; the same Prudence by which they provide an earthly Treasure, would, if attended to, conduct them likewise to an everlasting Inheritance.

But come what will of them and of this their worldly Wisdom, they afford a very good Instruction to the Children of Light. Let all who put in to be of that Number, seriously

seriously lay it to Heart, and be ashamed to yield the Prize of Wisdom to the Children of the World. And instead of losing their Reward through a stupid Carelessness and Remissness, let them endeavour so to run, as to obtain. Let them exert all their Faculties both of Mind and Body, to come at the glorious End they are in Chace of. Let them keep this ever in full View; let neither Business nor Pleasure divert them from it, or make them lose Sight of it: On the contrary, let them direct every thing this Way; let them labour this Point; let them account Things good or evil, hateful or desirable, only as they tend to promote or obstruct the Attainment of this their great End; let them think upon the Conduct of the wise Steward, and from his Conduct, with regard to Temporals, learn still a wiser Part, to make to themselves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, that when they fail, they may be received into everlasting Habitations; that is, instead of suffering the vain and transitory Goods of this Life, or our Anxiety after them, to be any Impediment to our future Happiness; use them so, as that when we shall

shall be turned out of our Stewardship, by putting off this earthly Tabernacle, they may become subservient to our grand Interest; instrumental in providing for, and securing to us an Inheritance incorruptible, not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens.

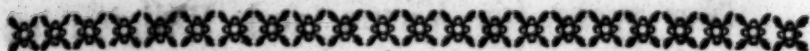


SERMON.



S E R M O N XII.

Of holding fast our Integrity.



JOB xxvii. 5. 6.

— *Till I die, I will not remove my Integrity from me.*

My Righteousness will I hold fast, and will not let it go; my Heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.



HE Book of *Job*, one of the antientest and most magnificent Pieces of Eastern Poetry, is replete with the most useful Instruction. The Hero is a most shining Example, an illustrious Instance of the most consummate

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consummate Virtue: He affords us that Sight which is worthy of God to behold, and which he never beholds without the highest Approbation, (*viz.*) *Virtue struggling with Adversity.*

In the Beginning of his History we have a large Account of his Wealth, Grandeur, and Prosperity of all Kinds; insomuch that he is pronounced the greatest of all the Men of the East.

Nor were his Virtue and Religion less remarkable, than his Riches and Magnificence. The Almighty himself stiles him his Servant *Job*; and gives him this distinguished Character, that there was none like him in the Earth, a perfect, and an upright Man, one that feared God, and eschewed Evil.

But perhaps as the Accuser of Mankind insinuated, his Piety was the Effect of his Prosperity. He found he throve by it.
“Doth *Job*, (says he) fear God for nought?
“Hast not thou made an Hedge about him,
“and about his House, and about all that
“he hath on every Side? Thou hast blessed
“the Work of his Hands, and his Substance
“is encreased in the Land.” No Thanks to
him

him for his Virtue, when it is thus signally rewarded. But put that Virtue to the Proof; try him in the Furnace of Affliction, and then see what will become of his famed Integrity: "Put forth thine Hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy Face."

In order to the more illustrious Manifestation of his Servant's Righteousness, the Almighty permits the Trial. And in consequence of this Permission we immediately read of a surprizing Alteration in the Circumstances of *Job*. How greatly is the Scene now changed? Him, whom he had but just before beheld blessed with every thing that is deemed good and desirable in Life, we now pronounce of all Men most miserable. From the Summit of Prosperity we see him plunged into the Abyss of Adversity.—The *Sabeans* fall upon his Oxen and upon his Asses — The Fire of God burns up his Sheep and his Servants — The *Chaldeans* fall upon his Camels, and carry them away — And heavier still, the dearest of all Possessions, his Children are destroyed; for a great Wind from the Wilderness smites the four Corners of the House where his Sons

and his Daughters were eating and drinking, and buries his feasting Family in the Ruins.

There is one Circumstance which ought not to be overlooked in this History of Calamities; and that is, the Quickness of their Succession. They came crouding upon him: No one Messenger of Evil had ever Time so much as to finish his dismal Narrative, but whilst he was yet speaking, in rushes another with new and heavier Tidings. — Misfortunes succeeding each other at some considerable Distance, are upon the Account of that Distance, more easily supportable; for in that Case we have Time for Reflection; and by the first Sufferings the Mind becomes acquainted with Sufferings, and is consequently in some Sort prepared against a new Stroke.

But this was not *Job's* Case: He had no Intervals for Reflection; not a Moment allowed in which he might summon his Virtue, and fortify himself against so many furious Attacks. They took him even as he was; accumulated Misfortunes seize him in the Zenith of his Happiness, till now, unknowing (by Experiment at least unknowing) what Misfortune meant.

How

How then does this Man of God behave on this sudden and shocking Alteration? Does he still retain his Integrity? Yes; and that too in Spite of Sollicitation to the contrary. In Spite too of the Devil's last and most furious Assault; the sore Boils with which he smote him from the Sole of his Foot unto his Crown. Yes; steadfast and unmoveable to the last: In all this *Job* sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. Hear his true Character in his own Language — “As
“God liveth who hath taken away my
“Judgment, and the Almighty who hath
“vexed my Soul. All the while my Breath
“is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my
“Nostrils, my Lips shall not speak Wicked-
“ness, nor my Tongue utter Deceit. — Till
“I die, I will not remove my Integrity
“from me. My Righteousness I hold fast,
“and will not let it go; my Heart shall not
“reproach me so long as I live.”

In discoursing on which Words, I propose first to shew wherein this Righteousness and Integrity consist.

And secondly. To encourage you to an uniform and steady Practice of it, from the Consideration of its Reward and Consequence

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— That our Hearts shall not reproach us so long as we live.

And first. Wherein does this Righteousness and Integrity consist?

There is no Title which we more liberally bestow upon one another, and which is in Truth seldomer deserved, than that of an *honest Man*. An honest Man is a very comprehensive Character; much more comprehensive than we can be supposed to imagine, when we make so frequent and light an Use of it. We commonly consider *Honesty* as that Virtue only which is opposed to Invasion of Property; and therefore we very judiciously confer the Title of *honest* upon every Man who keeps his Hands from picking and stealing, and has the Reputation of being, as they say, a *Fair-dealer*; i. e. in short, we call every Man *honest*, who is not a Robber and a Plunderer. This partial Conception of Honesty has a very bad Effect, a very mischievous Influence on the Bulk of Mankind; for if, as I said, they be not Robbers and Plunderers, they immediately fancy themselves honest Men; and in Right of this venerable Title, assume Confidence both towards God and Man, though in other
Parts

Parts of Life, they be Rogues and Villains of the first Magnitude. Thus for Instance, a Man may corrupt the Wife or Daughter of his Neighbour, and yet be all the while a *very honest Man*. Why? Because he would not for the World break his House, or pick his Pocket. And for the same Reason he may be idle and indolent, drunken and voluptuous, irreligious and profane even to that Degree, as to revile and blaspheme his God, and yet all the while be extremely *honest*.

Honestum or *Honesty* is with the antient Moralists but another Word for *Virtue*; *Virtue in the general*: By it they understood every Thing that was fit and right, good and commendable; every Branch of Duty towards God, our Neighbour, or ourselves. And to have called any Person an honest Man, who is not at the same Time a thoroughly good Man, would have been looked upon by them, as Absurdity and Contradiction.

And in the same general Sense does *Job* understand his Righteousness and Integrity. He means by it his whole Duty, as is evident by his Vindication of himself upon the several Articles of Chastity, Charity, and Piety. —

By his Integrity in the first Chapter is meant not Justice or moral Honesty as opposed to Fraud and Deceit, but his Patience and Resignation under the Hand of God; and his obstinate Adherence to what is *right*, notwithstanding his strong Temptations to the contrary. And the same Adherence to what he conceived to be right, is what he understands by his Righteousness and Integrity in the Text. His Comforters (as they called themselves) had been endeavouring to give the only Turn to his Misfortunes, which could render them truly insupportable, (*viz.*) That they were Indications of the divine Wrath and Displeasure, occasioned by some extraordinary Iniquity in his Hands. In Answer to this Charge, conscious of Uprightness, he nobly vindicates his Innocence; and tells his Accusers, that however they might labour this Point, they should never, out of Complaisance or from any other Motive whatsoever, extort from him any thing which was contrary to his real Sentiments: Any feigned Confession of Guilt, of Guilt which his Heart was not privy to; for which Confession, because false, his Heart must equally reproach him, as for any other Falsehood

hood whatsoever. — “ All the while my
“ Breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is
“ in my Nostriis, my Lips shall not speak
“ Wickedness, nor my Tongue utter Deceit.”
God forbid that should justify you, by al-
lowing your Reasonings and Accusations to
be just, when I know they are otherwise.
No; till I die, come on me what will; I
will not remove my Integrity from me; my
Righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it
go; my Heart shall not reproach me, so long
as I live.

By *Job's* Righteousness and Integrity then
is meant not only moral Honesty, but every
other Virtue; the whole Duty of Man, in
its largest Extent. He understands the same
with the Poet's *Integer Vitæ, sclerisque purus*;
the upright and the *innocent* Man: Innocent
of all Crimes; unspotted with Wickedness of
any Kind. — Whoever then deliberately vio-
lates his Duty in any Branch; whoever acts
contrary to his real Sentiments, his Judg-
ment, and his Conscience, *i. e.* in short,
whoever does in any Instance, what he *knows*
to be *wrong*, lets go his Righteousness, and
removes his Integrity from him,

The Man of this Integrity or universal Righteousness, takes all imaginable Care to come at the Knowledge of his Duty; and in his Search after it, he proceeds with the utmost Candour and Impartiality; unbiaſſed, uncorrupted, by any ſiniſter View, by any vicious Paſſion, or Inclination. And this Knowledge once obtained; having once ſettled his Judgment, like a Rock he remains ſtedfaſt and unmoveable; unmoveable by the moſt furious Winds and Waves that can aſſault him. — The heaviest Calamities cannot ſink him into Compliance, neither can the moſt enticing Pleaſures ſeduce him. Riches cannot purchaſe his Integrity; nor Grandeur awe him out of it — He is equally unmoved at Smiles and Frowns. He will not, in ſhort, barter away his Integrity for any Conſideration. He knows it to be a Pearl of great Price; a Jewel of ſuch ineſtimable Value, that by parting with it, he ſhould be an infinite Loſer, though the whole World ſhould be given him in Exchange for it.

This is the honeſt Man, properly ſo called: He who is reſolved, and ſteady, and reſolutely righteous. Not he, who wavers and fluctuates

fluctuates between right and wrong; who halts between God and Mammon; not he, who suits his Principles to his Interests and Inclinations; not he, who can either be soothed or frightened into mean and unworthy Compliances. Not the unmanly Sycophant, who is always most harmoniously chiming in with the Opinions of his Superiors; and who will even give up the Cause of God and Religion to please them — Not he, who prevaricates with Oaths, and invents Subterfuges, to evade the Obligation of Tests and Subscriptions — Not he, who corrupts Innocence, betrays Friendship, or falsifies his Word — Not the Drunkard, profane Swearer, or Blasphemer — Not, in fine, the vicious or irreligious of any Denomination: 'Tis he only, who has, in all Respects, clean Hands and a pure Heart; and who is determined at all Adventures to keep them so.

The Man of this Character (being conscious of acting up to his Judgment and his Conscience) is free from all Reproach from his own Heart; and how happy he is in this Circumstance; and what an Encouragement this is to a steady Practice of Integrity or universal Righteousness, was what I, in the
second

second Place, proposed to shew you. — “ Our
“ Hearts shall not reproach us so long as we
“ live — And if they do not reproach us,
we have what is essential to Happiness, our
own Approbation; for he who dislikes and
condemns himself, hates and abhors himself,
and consequently must be superlatively mi-
serable: It is of no Significancy to us that
Mankind think and speak well of us, if our
own Hearts tell us, we deserve another
Treatment. Though all Mankind should
agree in applauding and commending our
Behaviour, unless we have our own Appro-
bation, we cannot be satisfied; and if we
have that, we are satisfied in and from our-
selves. Happy is he (says the Apostle) who
condemneth not himself in that Thing which
he alloweth, *i. e.* who practises nothing but
what he approves. Happy upon many
Accounts he is, but particularly upon this,
that he is pleased and satisfied with his own
Conduct. He is sensible of having acted up
to the Judgment of his Mind, and in that
Reflection takes infinite Delight: For nothing
can be more unworthy of, or uneasy to a
reasonable Creature, than to act in Contra-
diction to his Reason and his Judgment. If
we

we approve the Things that are excellent, it is our Happiness to practise them, for it is our Happiness to practise what we approve. It was upon this Account that Virtue was wont to be deemed its own Reward: The Sense of having done what we approved, being thought an abundant Recompence for all the Trouble and Difficulty of doing it; the Pleasure resulting from the Consciousness of having acted as we ought, being thought more than an Equivalent for all the Pain and Misery which a steady Adherence to what was right might occasionally bring upon us: A rational Creature is not indeed capable of greater and more exalted Delight than what springs from the Applause of his own Heart. This makes it ever pleased, and in good Humour with itself; this provides it with a continual Feast.

But he whose Heart does not reproach him, has, besides the Pleasure resulting from this, what is still more fruitful of Happiness, the full Assurance of the divine Favour. He is not only satisfied himself with his Conduct, but he reflects likewise that his Conduct is seen and approved by the great Sovereign of the Universe; the Consequence of whose
Approbation

Approbation he knows to be an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory. Secure then by the Testimony of his Conscience, of the divine Favour and Protection, he cannot be miserable, be his present State and Condition what they will; for if all be but right at Home, nothing from without can greatly affect him.

For is he in Poverty and Adversity? if his Heart does not reproach him, he can comfort himself with this Reflection, that his Calamity is not owing to himself: And being not conscious of any extraordinary Iniquity in his Hands; but on the contrary, knowing that he has clean Hands and a pure Heart, he rests assured that the Almighty does not afflict him in Wrath, but in very Faithfulness, in Goodness and in Mercy. Nothing can render Adversity truly miserable, but an Apprehension of its being an Indication of the divine Displeasure. But he whose Heart does not reproach him, can never suspect it to be so to him. He must consider it just in the contrary Light, as a Mark of the divine Love and Favour. We should not therefore wonder, if such a one should even rejoice in Tribulations; as well knowing that the ultimate
Design

Design of all, is his Good. For whatever be the Cause of his present Sufferings; whether they be sent for the Correction of those Faults and Infirmities from which no Man lives exempt, or for the Trial and Illustration of his Virtue, or for whatever other Reason; yet still being conscious of the Uprightness of his Ways, he has Confidence towards God. And not only so, but he has this further Confidence likewise, that when these light, momentary Afflictions shall have an End, his Patience, his Uprightness, his Righteousness and Integrity, shall meet with an inconceivable Recompence in the Heavens.

Again. Is he who is thus tenacious of his Integrity, vilified and despised? Does he suffer in his good Name and Reputation? Is he reviled and reproached, and (as is the common Fate of good Men) represented in the falsest and the blackest Colours? be it so; but to him all these Calumnies and Reproaches are pointless; he examines into his own Heart, and if he finds that does not reproach him, he fears not the Reproach of Men, neither regards he their Revilings: He moves in a superior Sphere; above the little Arts of Slander and Defamation: And
happy

happy and secure in his Height, he looks down from his exalted Situation, with Pity and Contempt upon the vain and impotent Efforts of the Herd below.

Again. He whose Heart acquits him is unmoved at any evil Tidings; conscious of Righteousness he is bold as a Lion; an absolute Stranger to Fear of any Kind. He knows but of one Thing which is truly fearful; the Wrath of God: And his Heart tells him that he is so far from having Reason to fear that, that he is entitled to his Love. His Heart therefore standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord, that he will surely deliver him in the Time of Trouble. “He cannot
“therefore fear, though the Earth be moved,
“and though the Hills be carried into the
“Midst of the Sea; though the Waters
“thereof rage and swell, and though the
“Mountains shake at the Tempest of the
“same; he is not afraid of the Pestilence
“that walketh in Darkness; nor of the
“Arrow that destroyeth at the Noon-day:
“Not afraid, though Thousands fall before
“him, and Ten Thousands at his right
“Hand.” Though all Nature should be dissolved, yet fearless will he stand the Shock.

Shock. — And what indeed should he fear? Natural Death? No! it is the Apprehension of something after that, which is so frightful. 'Tis the Dread of the second Death, which gives all the Terror to the first. The upright Man therefore laughs at the first, because he does not fear the second. The King of Terrors advances to him, unheeded at least, if not courted and wished for. He in Triumph asks him, O Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory? He has in Truth despoiled him of his Sting, and swallowed him up in Victory — His Heart not reproaching him, instead of foreboding Evil, he is ravished with an opening Scene of Happiness. He sees Heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God, ready to receive him into the Joy of his Lord. Conscious of having fought the good Fight of Faith, he is sure of the Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge hath prepared for all those, who by patient Continuance in Well-doing have sought for Glory and Immortality.

Such is the Consequence of holding fast our Integrity; such the Happiness of him, whose Heart does not reproach him: For no
Adversity,

Adversity, no Calumny, no Terror, not even that of Death itself, can move him: He is Proof against every thing that can befall him. His Happiness is liable to no Accidents, subject to no Caprice of Fortune; it is independent of every thing without him; he being satisfied from himself, and complete in himself.

But how different from this is his Condition, who is cut to the Heart by inward Reproach? This is a Sword which pierceth through our Souls; this, like the everlasting Punishment of the damned, of which it is a Foretaste, permitteth no Rest Day nor Night. The tormenting Nature of this Self-accusation is, by the Antients, very strongly represented by a Vulture's gnawing and preying upon the Vitals: It is a perpetual corroding Pain; a never-dying, never-ceasing Worm. — The Terms in which the Almighty threatens his chosen People, in Case of Rebellion and Apostacy, seem peculiarly expressive of the Misery of his Condition. — In the Morning thou shalt say, would to God it were Evening; and in the Evening thou shalt say, would to God it were Morning; for the Anguish of thine Heart, and for the Sight of
thine

thine Eyes, which thou shalt see. This represents that Weariness, that Dislike, and Disrelish of every thing *present*, which is strongly expressive of inward Agony; it is exactly the Behaviour of Persons in Extremity of Pain, who are always shifting their Place and Position, in Hopes of some little Ease and Relief in a new Situation; but no sooner are they in it, than they beg as earnestly and as fruitlessly too, to return to the former.

The Truth is, where the Heart reproaches, the Mind is haunted, and is therefore ever striving, by all imaginable Arts and Contrivances, to fly from the frightful Apparition. But in vain, Alas! the Fiend is within us, which therefore we can never hope to avoid, till we can fly from ourselves.

Thus self-frighted, self-tormented, we are incapable of the least Glimmerings of Joy from any thing in Nature, however calculated for Delight. All Nature sickens about us; the sweetest Enjoyments sour; and the brightest Objects look gloomy.

And as Self-Reproach gives a Disrelish to all Pleasure, so it adds Strength to Misery and a new Sting to Pain. It raises and aggravates Misfortunes into the highest Pitch

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of Misery; for if we are in Adversity, it is the Vengeance of an angry God. — If hated and despised of Men, our own Hearts extort a Confession of the Justice of it; and being abandoned by them, we have no Place of Refuge; no Shelter to fly to: For we have no Confidence in God, and consequently no Complacency in ourselves. — If the Judgments of the Lord are abroad in the Earth, we are ready to cry out now, (as we shall do hereafter) to the Mountains to hide us, and to the Hills to cover us. To cover us; to protect us from the out-stretch'd Arm of God; which our Guilt prompts us to believe is peculiarly designed against us. — Nothing is so timorous as Guilt: Experience shews it: The Guilty often betraying themselves thro' Fear; and through Fear unwittingly confessing the unsuspected Wickedness. — A State of Fear is surely a State of the heaviest Bondage; and such is a State of Wickedness; for the Sinner knowing he deserves Vengeance, is every Moment expecting it; and therefore always dreading it, not only where there is real Danger, but even where no Fear is. — And if the Self-Accuser be always thus fearful, what must his Condition be in the Hour of Death? In that Hour when we stand

stand in need of all the Succours of Religion and Virtue to support us. How will the Heart then renew her Reproaches? How will the King of Terrors set himself in Array against him? In short, destitute, afflicted, tormented, he is and must be. His own Heart acknowledges the Justice of the Sentence, "Depart, thou cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels." To conclude,

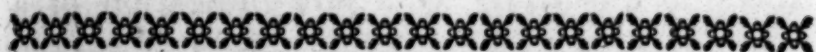
Sensible therefore of the Consequence of holding fast our Integrity, let no Temptation induce you to part with it. Be resolute in Virtue; be obstinately righteous. Be not bought out with Riches; be not frightened by Power; be not seduced by Pleasure. Let the Reverence of no Man cause you to sin. On the contrary, reverence yourselves; have Regard to your own Peace both here and hereafter. And if you have this Regard, (which one should think it needless to exhort you to) you will think the Reproaches of your own Hearts, more than a Counterpoise to all the Temptations, which the World, the Flesh, or the Devil, can throw in your Way.

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S E R M O N XIII.

Of the Application due to Religion.



2 PETER i. 10.

Wherefore the rather Brethren give Diligence, to make your Calling and Election sure.



HOEVER takes a View of the general Conduct of Mankind with regard to Religion, must be tempted to believe, that they look upon it, as an Affair either of a very easy, or of a very trifling and indifferent Nature ;

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Nature; either, as having so little Difficulty in it, as to require no Pains; or as being of so little Consequence as to deserve none. Whoever, I say, reflects upon the religious Conduct of Mankind, cannot help believing but that one of these is the received Opinion. For how can it be imagined, that an Affair both of Difficulty and Importance can be treated negligently and indifferently by those who understand its Nature? Our Manner of acting is the Consequence of our Manner of thinking; a disrespectful Behaviour therefore towards any thing is a sure Indication of a contemptible Opinion of it. And if by this Rule we judge of the common Opinion of Religion, *i. e.* if we judge of Men's Sentiments of it, by their Treatment of it, we cannot help concluding that there are few Things they think more slightly of. For how few Things are there, or rather, is there any thing which it is not made to give way to? Religion seems at best to be but the Employment of our *leisure Hours*; it is the *Business* but of few. Men will indeed sometimes take it in their Way, but by no means go out of their Way for it. If they can perform the Offices of it without putting themselves

selves to any Pain or Trouble they are content; but they will not suffer it to interfere with their great Concerns of this World; they will not suffer it to break in upon their Pleasures: Nay, they will not forego even an idle Amusement for the Sake of it. Witness that sauntering Generation, who will rather let their Time hang (in their own Phrase) heavy upon their Hands, than employ it in the Duties of Religion.

Nor does our slight Opinion of Religion appear only from our preferring every other Consideration to it, but likewise from our Behaviour even when we are employed about it, if with any Sort of Propriety we can be said to be so employed. I am sure the Behaviour of Numbers in the House of Religion demonstrates (whatever they may pretend) that they are by no Means *employed* about Religion. In all the Affairs of Religion we shew a manifest Coolness and Indifference: An absolute Want of Attention and Application. We pray so negligently; we praise so coldly; we sorrow so faintly; we resolve so languidly, that it is manifest we are far from being in earnest. It is easy to know when Men are in earnest with any

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Affair: In such Cases, they shew such an unwearied Diligence; such a steady Application, that it is impossible to mistake them. But with regard to the Business of Religion, there is no one who has the least Knowledge of Men will affirm, that any such Diligence or Application appears. On the contrary, he must be sensible, that there is nothing treated more slightly and indifferently; nothing as of less Difficulty, or less Moment.

The Perfection of Wisdom consists in weighing deliberately the Difficulty and Importance of Things, and in giving each that Degree of Diligence and Application which is due to it. If then Religion be a Business both of Difficulty and Consequence, a rational Creature cannot answer it to its Understanding, to treat it negligently and remissly. And this is a Piece of Wisdom which Men need not be put in mind of, with regard to any Affair but that of Religion.

To what then can this partial Way of Proceeding be owing? Why must Religion only be denied that Diligence and Application which are due to it? Is it really because Men think meanly and contemptibly of it? Or is it, because they do not think of it at all.

To

To both these it is undoubtedly owing, but principally to the last: For upon a serious Reflection it must be confessed to be at once the most difficult and important of all Concerns; but this Reflection, the Cares of this World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches prevent and suppress. We are engaged in a Scene of Business and Pleasure; so mightily engaged that we are not to be called off from it by any other Concern, however more deserving of our Attention. The Trifles of this present Life so engross us, that the momentous Business of the next is left utterly neglected, and unthought of.

It is therefore of exceeding great Use to us, to be sometimes put in mind of our true Interest; to be shewn the Folly and Vanity of our unwearied Pursuit after the Goods of this World; and the infinite Wisdom of bestowing all our Labour upon the Concerns of the next, *i. e.* upon Religion. And this I shall endeavour to do by shewing you

First. That Religion is a Business of that Difficulty as to *require* our utmost Diligence and Application.

And Secondly. That it is an Affair of that Consequence as to *deserve* it.

And

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And First. Religion is a Business of that Difficulty as to require our utmost Diligence and Application. And this appears from the Perfection of Righteousness which is required of us, and from the many and great Obstructions which lie in our Way to that Perfection.

We well know that it is no ordinary Degree of Righteousness which Christianity requires at our Hands. No; it commands us to seek that we may excell, and to go on unto Perfection: To add to our Faith, Virtue; to Virtue, Knowledge; to Knowledge, Temperance; to Temperance, Patience; to Patience, Godliness; to Godliness, brotherly Kindness; and to brotherly Kindness, Charity: And these Things must not only be in us, but they must abound in us, (*i. e.*) it is not sufficient that we possess these Virtues in a low Degree: No; as much as is possible in our present State: They must be perfect and compleat, wanting nothing. Christianity is not content with regulating our outward Actions; but it penetrates into our Hearts; and forbids as much an evil Disposition, as an evil Action. It commands us not only to pay external Worship to our great Creator,
but

but likewise to yield him the inward Homage of our Minds; to love and adore him. It commands us not only, not to murder our Brother, but likewise not so much as to injure him either in Word or Thought: We must not slander and ridicule him, nay we must not even think hardly and uncharitably of him. We must be so far from defrauding him of his Possessions, that we must not even so much as covet them. We must not only forgive an Enemy, but we must love him; not only not retaliate an Injury, but repay it with Kindness. We must not only abstain from outward Acts of Lewdness, but we must likewise purify our Minds: For Adultery it seems may be committed in the Heart. In a Word, Christianity does not only require Virtue of us, but the Sublimity of Virtue. It regulates not only the outward, but likewise the inward Man; not only our Actions, but our Hearts.

But to this Perfection of Righteousness how great and many are the Obstructions?

There is first our natural Weakness and Infirmary. This we feel so sensibly that it need not be proved upon us. Nay, what is more, we are not only weak and impotent,
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we are even averſe and indispoſed to our Duty. “ We feel a Law in our Members “ warring againſt the Law of our Minds, and “ bringing us into Captivity to the Law of “ Sin. The Good therefore which we “ would, we do not; but the Evil which we “ would not, that we do:” We have not Power to act up to the Judgment of our Minds, but in ſpite of Reason and Con- viction are led Captive at the Will of every lawleſs Paſſion.

But beſides this natural Weakneſs and even Indispoſition to Virtue, we are, ſecondly, ſurrounded with a Number of Temptations to Vice. The World is ever attacking us with its Poms and Vanities: It gives its Honours, and its Riches the Poſſeſſion of our Hearts. The Fleſh ſets our Appetites and our Paſſions at Work; and the Heart which was impregnable by Riches and Ho- nours, becomes perhaps an eaſy Prey to Pleaſure.

We have, thirdly, the Power of Satan to grapple with; and his Artifices to defeat. He as a roaring Lion is for ever going about, ſeeking whom he may devour. He is ever on the Watch to ſurprize us; ever
laying

laying Schemes to destroy us; continually and artfully plying us with those Temptations which are best adapted to our Condition. Our Progress in Virtue is therefore not only obstructed by our natural Weakness and Corruption, but likewise by a Variety of Temptations, which are ever managed in the most artful Manner by a powerful and crafty Adversary. What then requires Diligence and Application, if Religion does not? Is it a little Thing to conquer the Bent of Nature: Does it require no Attention to remain unseduced in the Midst of every thing that is capable of seducing. And can a War with Principalities and Powers; with spiritual Wickedness in high Places, be both successfully and carelessly carried on? It is impossible. If ever Diligence, Resolution, and Courage be necessary, they are in these Cases.

In the Holy Scriptures we are often called upon, to exert all our Faculties both of Soul and Body in this difficult Affair. Thus are we exhorted to give all Diligence, to add to our Faith, Virtue, &c. to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling; and to give Diligence to make our Calling and Election

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Election sure. Our Saviour tells us, that the Gate of Heaven is so strait, that we must strive to enter in; that the Way to it is so narrow, that few there be that find it. He commands us to watch and pray, to have always our Loins girt, and our Lamps burning; *i. e.* to be always diligent and careful in our Duty; never to be off our Guard, lest we be surprized.

This is the Language of Scripture, and of the Propriety of it our own sad Experience may convince us. For who will assert that he meets with no formidable Enemy in his christian Warfare? Who will maintain, that the Course he is to run is smooth and broad? Who will say, he finds no Difficulty in resisting the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil? Is it an easy Matter to mortify and subdue our inordinate Lusts and Appetites, and to say to them, hitherto shall ye come but no further? Is it easy punctually to perform all our Vows and Resolutions of Amendment? Does it require no Labour to break off an obstinate and inveterate Habit? Is it no Pain to pluck out a right Eye, or to cut off a right Hand? Can we without Reluctance part with our favourite

favourite Passion, even the beloved of our Souls? Or do we again in our Intercourses with Heaven, find it an easy Task to prevent that Coldness, that Inattention, those Wanderings of Thought, which we are so apt to fall into, and which we are sensible are great Affronts to the Majesty of that Being we address? Whoever will say he finds no Difficulties in all this, must be supposed either to be ignorant of the Nature of the Work he is about, or to do it deceitfully.

But the great Difficulty of all is the Regulation of the Heart. Who will say, I have made my Heart clean? Whoever talks of the Easiness of Religion, and of the little Pains it requires, must surely forget this Part of it; and this Part of it is most certainly too often forgot, or we should not see the evil Heart so frequently betray itself in the Midst of the loudest Pretences to Religion.

If then Religion be an Affair of such a Nature as to require our utmost Diligence and Application, let us, in the second Place, inquire, whether it be of Importance enough to deserve it. Let us see, whether it will answer all the Trouble it cost us? Whether it will pay us for our Labour? Of the Things
of

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of this World we daily experience the Benefit; what we expect from Religion is at a Distance. Let us then examine, whether what Religion promises in Reversion, be really preferable to what we have now in Possession.

Now were there no other Difference between the Happiness of the present and future State than this, that the one is transient, the other permanent: The one temporal, the other eternal; were there, I say, no other Difference, yet even this would abundantly demonstrate the Wisdom of giving the greater Diligence and Application to secure our future Happiness. For let the Happiness of this present World be supposed ever so great, and of Continuance ever so long, so it be but short of eternal, and it will admit of no Comparison with an everlasting Inheritance. The Reflection that our Happiness is some Time or other to have an End, is enough to damp the greatest Enjoyments; for when that Time comes, they are to us as though they had never been. An eternal Happiness therefore, though inferior in Degree, is more deservedly to be sought after, than any other how great soever, if transient and temporal.

This

This single Circumstance then of future Happiness, that it is eternal, should carry it against all the Advantages of our present State, be they supposed ever so many or so great. Our Happiness hereafter is to have no more End than our Existence, while the Happiness of this Life is confined to a very small Portion of it. To consult our future Happiness is therefore to consult the Happiness of our whole Being; to secure an Happiness commensurate to our Existence; while the Provision of temporal Enjoyments is at best but providing for a momentary Happiness; an Happiness, which is as the Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew which passeth away.

In common Life, the most durable Pleasures are what wise Men place the greatest Value on. A present and more exquisite Delight they will readily forego for Enjoyments less intense, but more durable. Nay, they will not only forego Pleasure, but even endure Pain in Prospect of a lasting Good.

Happiness is indeed to be measured not so much by the Degree as by the Duration of it. Let therefore the Pleasures of this World

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have all the Concessions made to them that that can be desired; let them be allowed to be as great as the most debauched Fancy can imagine them; yet still the single Circumstance of Eternity and future Happiness must intitle it to our greatest Diligence: This alone must carry it against all other Advantages whatsoever.

Again; as Happiness is desirable in Proportion as it is durable, so likewise is Misery to be avoided in Proportion to the Continuance of it. The Circumstance of Eternity increases Misery as much as it does Happiness: It makes the one as dreadful, as it makes the other valuable. An eternal Misery is therefore infinitely more to be fled from than any other, how acute and intolerable soever for the Time. Be therefore the present Misery of Poverty and Want, of Ignominy and Contempt, ever so great; yet it will vanish upon comparing it with the Misery of the future State, which is everlasting.

Religion is then an Affair of eternal Consequence: It is the securing an eternal Happiness, and the avoiding an eternal Misery.

Upon

Upon this Account, therefore, it is our most important Business, and justly challenges our utmost Diligence and Application.

But this is not all; the Happiness of the next Life is not only eternal in Duration, but in Degree also inconceivably great. It is not only an eternal, but likewise an exceeding Weight of Glory. It surpasses the Happiness of this Life not more in Duration, than in intrinsic Worth and Excellence; and the same Difference there is likewise between the present and future Misery. They are so disproportionate in Degree, that they would admit of no Comparison even were they of equal Continuance.

The Business of the next Life must therefore, upon all Accounts, have the first Place in our Thoughts. Indeed, did we act like rational Creatures, we should have no other Business: At least we should suffer no other to come in Competition with it. And yet if we take a View of the World (and a melancholy View it is) we shall see this to be almost the only Business that is neglected. Did we but allow ourselves Time for Reflection, it would be impossible to act thus irrationally, thus inconsistently with our true Interest:

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Would we, when hot in the Pursuit of worldly Happiness, but recollect that we are labouring for the Wind; that we are in Chase of short-liv'd and unsatisfactory Enjoyments, it could not but give a Check to our Career: Nor could we help condemning ourselves as more foolish even than the Beasts that perish, for our eager Pursuit of such Trifles; while we neglect the Care of the most substantial and durable Happiness. Upon the least Reflection we are all deeply sensible of the infinite Difference between the Things which are seen and the Things which are not seen; and yet notwithstanding this (though nothing can divert us from our temporal Affairs) yet every the least Pretence will serve to take us off from our eternal: Our spiritual Concerns, shall give Place to the most trifling of our secular. One goes to his Farm, and another to his Merchandize, while the Business of Eternity is postponed to a further Day. It is a common Rule of Prudence to dispatch the most important Business first; would we then govern ourselves by this Rule in our spiritual Affairs, happy should we be. But such is our Infatuation, that though this Rule be universally observed

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in our temporal Affairs, it is too often overlooked in our eternal. Would we but ask ourselves which is most worthy of our Care, the Conveniencies of a Journey, or our Welfare at the Journey's End? The Answer would instruct us in our first and principal Concern. We are here (according to an old but just and beautiful Similitude) but Strangers and Travellers; journeying to our proper Country; our continuing City. But the Misfortune is, that we seldom consider ourselves in this Light; we are too apt to imagine ourselves properly at Home in the Body, and therefore to bestow all our Labour in providing for ourselves a comfortable Being here.

The Wisdom of giving all Diligence to secure an eternal Interest in Preference to all other Concerns whatsoever, is often laid before us. We cannot therefore plead Ignorance in this Matter. No! It is the Presence of Things temporal that so firmly attaches us to them. But we would do well to remember, that there will be a Time when Things eternal will be present to us also, and then we shall wish we had acted

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another Part. Then we shall wish, that our Labour and Travel had been better employed. When we are about to be torn from this World's Goods, we shall then begin to be sensible of their Vanity; and then in vain shall we lament our Folly: Our desperate Folly in preferring transitory Happiness to an everlasting Inheritance. We shall then be sensible that we have laboured for that which profiteth not; that we have risen up early, and sat up late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness for Things of no Value; while at the same Time (bitter Reflection) we have grudged to bestow the least Degree of Care and Diligence, upon securing those Treasures which would never leave us, nor forsake us. To conclude,

If Religion then both *requires* and *deserves* our Diligence, let us remember this, and shew ourselves Men: Let us behave like rational Creatures, and no longer treat as a light and trivial Thing, what is in Truth at once the most *arduous* and *important*. Let us be in earnest in the Prosecution of our true Interest, *i. e.* let us give all Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure.

There

There is one Observation which the Language of the Text so remarkably suggests, that it cannot be omitted.

Give *Diligence* to make your *Calling* and *Election* *sure*.

Calling and *Election* are among the favourite Words upon which the *dangerous* and *frightful* Doctrine of Predestination is founded; and yet in the very same Sentence are we earnestly exhorted to make Use of our own Endeavours. It is hence plain to a Demonstration that *Calling* and *Election* are dependent on our Conduct and Behaviour. Give Diligence to make them *sure*, says the Apostle. — Now if our Behaviour can make them *sure*; by necessary Consequence it can also make them *doubtful*. And by still farther necessary Consequence it can also entirely set aside and overthrow them. — It can *recall* and *annull* them.

All Men may be said to be called and elected inasmuch as it is the Purpose, Intention, and Will of their common Father, that they all should be happy; and as he has put it in the Power of them all to be saved if they please, by making a due Use of the Means, *greater* or *less*, which he has graciously

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ciously vouchsafed to afford them. — Christians, all Christians are specially and more particularly called and elected by having special and more extraordinary Means vouchsafed them. They are more highly favoured, they stand distinguished. They therefore may be said, with high Emphasis, to be peculiarly called and elected.

And yet, notwithstanding all these great and signal Favours, notwithstanding this super-abundant Grace, all Christians, without *Exception*, are yet exhorted to give Diligence to make their Calling and Election sure. Do not such Exhortations indeed run through the whole Gospel? Do they not almost make the *Body* of it? But why? To what Purpose all this Preaching, beseeching and exhorting, if we are already called and elected, independently of any thing we ourselves can do? They would certainly be useless, be nugatory; and what we can never suppose to proceed from a wise, much less from the all-wise Being. And if Calling and Election to Salvation be thus manifestly dependent on our own good Behaviour, much more may we suppose that *Condemnation* is the Consequence of our Ill-Behaviour; for *Favours*
are

are free. Beneficence may bestow its Grace and Bounties wherever it pleases, but not so is it with Punishment or Misery; for these necessarily imply a Desert of them. *Misery*, inflicted under the Notion of *Punishment* on those who do not deserve it, is *Injustice*; and Misery without Cause or Reason, under any Notion, or in any Light, is *Cruelty*. — If therefore the Scriptures assure us, that our Salvation depends upon our working it out with Fear and Trembling, *i. e.* upon our own earnest and anxious Endeavours; much more must Reprobation be supposed to be the just and fair Consequence of our working all Uncleanneſs with Greedineſs. If *Salvation* cannot be obtained without in *some Sort* deserving it, surely *Damnation* cannot be incurred without *thoroughly* deserving it. — So indeed ſay the Scriptures, where repreſenting the Almighty, as one who has no Pleaſure in the Death of the Sinner, but as willing that Men ſhould repent and be ſaved; and every where exhorting, beſeeching, and conjuring us to flee from the Wrath to come. And ſurely where can be the Senſe of all this Importunity, if all the while it is out of
our

our Power to flee from it? — Exhortations to Goodness, in order to Happiness, when that Happiness is before hand fixed, is, I have said, needless; and what cannot be supposed to proceed from a wise, much less an all-wise Being. But in this Case, they are more than needless and nugatory: Here they are Mockery and Insult, and cannot be supposed to proceed from a sincere, good, and righteous Being; much less from infinite Perfection.

To this Doctrine of Revelation, Natural Reason gives full Assent — For as Men are Free Agents, endowed with Capacity of choosing, and Power of pursuing their Choice, *i. e.* as they are moral and accountable Agents, they are both *capable* and *deserving* of Rewards and Punishments; and therefore their well or ill-being must, in all Reason, be supposed to depend upon themselves, upon their own Choice.

The Counsels and Decrees of God are among the secret Things which belong unto him only: The Things which are revealed are what alone belong unto us. And what is revealed in this Point, is plainly and expressly this — That sufficient Grace and
Means

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Means of Salvation are vouchsafed unto every Man; and after that, every Man is to reap the Fruit of his own Doings.

Here then rests the Matter. — If you live wicked and unchristian Lives (*presume what you will*) you can never be *happy* — If you live good and christian Lives (*fear nothing*) you can never be *miserable*.



S E R M O N.



S E R M O N XIV.

The Necessity of a timely Repentance.



St. JOHN ix. 4.

*I must work the Works of him that
sent me, while it is Day; the Night
cometh when no Man can work.*

T H E S E Words of our blessed Sa-
viour were spoken with Allusion
to a wonderful Work he was then
about to perform, (*viz.*) the giving Sight to
a Man blind from his Birth; and the Mean-
ing of them is this; that he must accomplish
the

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the Business for which he came into the World; that he must perform the Works which his Father had given him to finish, while the Day or his Life continued; for that the Night of his Death was drawing near in which it was impossible to work. This, (I say,) is the Meaning of the Words, as spoken by our Saviour; and from them, (without regard to the particular Occasion upon which he spoke them) we may draw an exceeding useful and instructive Lesson: For from them we may learn that this Life is our Day, in which we must work the Works of him that sent us; in which we must answer the Ends for which we were created and sent into the World: For that if we let this Opportunity slip, the Night comes on; the Night of Sickness and Death, in which no Man can work, at least not effectually and successfully. From them we may learn, that To-day, the Time of Life and Health and Strength, is the proper Season for working out our Salvation: For that there is no Repentance either on the Death-bed, or in the Grave, to which we are hastening.

When

When we look abroad into the World, and observe the general Conduct of Mankind with regard to Religion, one would almost think, that either they had entirely forgot the great Work that was given them to do; or else that they knew of some other Season for the doing it, equally good and sufficient with the present: And the latter of these is, in Truth, too often the Case. They are sensible enough, that they must work the Works, of him that sent them; but they will not acknowledge the Necessity of doing them while it is Day; of doing them in the Time of Health and Strength: They flatter themselves, that it will be Time enough to think of this when the Night of Sickness comes on; when Death is in immediate View. To what Purpose then should they trouble themselves with that uneasy Task through a long Series of Years, which can be done with equal Success in a few Days or Hours, upon a Death-bed.

It is this fond Opinion that lulls Men in their Vices, that makes them solace themselves in Sin. It is this that makes them entertain Hopes of Happiness hereafter, at the same Time that they indulge themselves in all Sin
and

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and Wickedness here : It is this that renders all Exhortations to Righteousness and Virtue of no Effect : For these, 'tis thought, are proper only for the sick : That the strong and healthful have as little Need of the Admonitions of the Preacher, as of the Prescriptions of the Physician ; for it is not they that be whole, but they only that are sick, that want either of these.

But were Men convinced, that the Time of Health was the only possible Time of working out their Salvation, that if this Work be not done in the Day, it must be let alone for ever ; that the Night of Sickness is the wrong Time for Repentance, for that then they will find no Place for it, even though they seek it carefully with Tears. Were Men (I say) once well convinced of this, it would be next to an Impossibility for them so to persevere in the Neglect of the one Thing needful.

And to convince you of this ; to lay before you the absolute Necessity of an early Repentance, of setting about that great Work in Time, so as to be able to prove its Sincerity by its Fruits ; and to shew you the desperate Madness of trusting to a Death-bed Repentance,

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ance, is the Business of the following Discourse; in which I shall endeavour to shew you,

First. That Repentance in Time of Health, is the only Repentance which can be supposed to proceed from a religious Principle; and consequently the only Repentance which can be supposed to be acceptable to God.

Secondly. That it is the only Repentance to which the Scripture-Promises of Pardon and Mercy are annexed.

Thirdly. That to suppose any other Repentance generally, and in the ordinary Course of Things, available to Salvation, is inconsistent with the fundamental Design of all Religion. And,

Lastly. That Repentance in itself is a Work extremely difficult to be performed upon a Death-bed. And,

First. I am to shew you that Repentance in Time of Health is the only Repentance which can be supposed to proceed from a religious Principle, and consequently the only Repentance which can be supposed to be acceptable to God.

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We need not be told of what Consequence the Principle of our Actions is: Indeed the Morality of them entirely depends upon it; for they are virtuous and religious, or they are otherwise just according to the Principle which gives Birth to them. Our outward Actions, however seemingly great and good, may be but splendid Sins; for 'tis our Principle alone can make them Virtues. The Seat of Religion is the Heart; from its Disposition therefore do our outward Actions take both their Name and Nature. Of this (I say) we need not be told; for 'tis the Rule we make use of in judging of one another, for 'tis not the Action itself, but the Design of the Doer only, which we regard. We thank no Man for an undesigned Good, nor hate any one for an undesigned Evil. 'Tis the Disposition makes the Friend or Enemy; and just so it is in the Business of Religion; for no Matter for the Outside of our Actions, the Religion of them is in their Principle.

Our Repentance then, to make it acceptable to God, must proceed from a religious Principle, and this Principle is a Sense of Duty: A Sense of the Obligations we are
under

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under to serve and obey our great Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. 'Tis not so much Fear, as Love that must influence us; we must repent not only for Wrath, but also, and more especially, for Conscience Sake; not only because it is our Interest, but because it is our Duty. 'Tis not so much a Dread of God's Power as a Love of his Goodness, that should lead us to Repentance. Religion is a Labour of Love: 'Tis not Fear but Love that is the fulfilling of the Law. That Repentance therefore, is the only acceptable Repentance, which proceedeth from and worketh by Love.

Fear indeed is the Beginning of Wisdom; the Terrors of the Lord are what do at first awaken and arouse the Sinner from his Lethargy. They are necessary likewise to go along with us, to keep us steady in the Practice of our Duty; to be a Counterpoise to the Difficulties we may meet with in the Ways of Virtue. It is undoubtedly designed that we should be influenced in our Conduct, by the Consideration of the Rewards and Punishments of the Gospel: For why else are they, in such strong Terms, proposed to us and pressed upon us? To have Respect to

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an After-reckoning is undoubtedly lawful and right, but then it is not all that that we are to have Respect to : The Fear of Punishment is one proper Motive to lead us to Repentance, but it must not be the only one. For if Fear be itself sufficient, why are we commanded to love God, as well as to fear him ?

If then that Repentance only be acceptable to God, which proceeds chiefly from a Sense of Duty and a Love of God, what Pretence can the dying Sinner make to such Repentance ? How can the Love of God be said to dwell in him ? In him who has grown old in Wickedness ! Who has spent the whole Time of his sojourning here in a continued Contempt of God and Religion. If such an one appears penitent, 'tis not Religion but Fear that is the genuine Cause of his Repentance : That it is indeed wholly to be ascribed to Fear is demonstrably clear from these two Considerations :

First. That there is no other assignable Cause of it, but only Fear : And,

Secondly. That it comes and goes with our Fear, and bears Proportion to it.

First. A Death-bed Repentance is the pure Effect of Fear, by reason there is no
other

other assignable Cause of it. There are no Arguments for the Necessity of a religious Life offered to the Sinner upon his Death-bed, but what he was well acquainted with in his Health: Whatever Beauty and Loveliness there is in Virtue; whatever Obligations there are upon rational Creatures to love and serve the Fountain of their Happiness; in a Word, whatever Reasonableness there is in Religion, have been all again and again laid before him in the clearest, and pressed upon him in the strongest Terms. There is nothing new in his Circumstances but his Fear; and therefore to that Fear alone must the Alteration of his Judgment be imputed. While the Evil he now dreads was at a Distance, like the deaf Adder he stopped his Ears, and refused to hear the Voice of the Charmer, though he charmed never so wisely; he was Proof against every Argument of what Kind soever that could be offered to persuade him to Repentance. But now as eternal Punishment is in immediate View, the Necessity of arguing is superseded; his Fears are instead of ten thousand Arguments. The Reasonableness and Necessity of Religion are equally clear in Sickness

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and in Health ; that therefore they are more seen and acknowledged in Sickness, is owing to somewhat peculiar to that Condition, and that is, Fear.

But to put it out of Doubt that a Death-bed Repentance is the pure Effect of Fear, we may observe, — Secondly, That this Repentance comes and goes with our Fear, and always bears Proportion to it. While there are Hopes of Life, there are no Thoughts of Repentance ; but as the former lessen, the latter encrease : And when our Distemper is at the highest, our Repentance is so too. If again that abates, our Repentance relaxes in Proportion : We go backward in Religion, as we advance in Health ; and remove the immediate Fear of Death entirely, and our Repentance is gone with it ; and we return like the Dog to his Vomit, and like the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the Mire. Nay, sometimes the Sinner returns to his beloved Enjoyments, as after a long Abstinence, with new and fresh Vigour ; and perhaps with impious Raillery ridicules his late Repentance which now (with desperate Insolence) he styles, ignoble Cowardice. The Sinner, now made whole, instead of endeavouring

vowing to sin no more, (which in his Fear he had earnestly resolved) laughs at the Folly of the Resolution, and is at present as angry at his Repentance, as he was lately at his Sins. Of Religion he thinks no more till a new Prospect of Death opens, and then his Repentance (if it can in any Sense be so called) never fails to return with his Fears: He has as many Fits of Repentance, as he has Fits of Sickness. Fear then is surely the sole Cause of a Death-bed Repentance, which we see depends upon it, comes and goes with it, and always bears Proportion to it; and if such be its only Cause, we have abundantly seen, that it cannot be supposed to be acceptable to God.

The only Repentance therefore that can be depended on, is that which is begun in Time of Health, before the evil Days come; before we see ourselves on the Brink of Perdition: For this Repentance we may be sure is the Result of Reason and Conviction, not of Fear and Distraction: We have now Time calmly and deliberately to examine into the Obligations of Religion, and to repent upon Principle. This is a cool and sedate Re-

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pentance; Repentance, begun with Consideration, and founded on Reason; and which will therefore, in all Probability, be stable and permanent. This Kind of Repentance does not however exclude Fear; this rational Penitent (as it is fit and designed he should) has a Respect to the Rewards and Punishments of the Gospel; and as (in Time of Health especially) they are considered as at some Distance from him, to be awed and influenced by them, is a very proper Exercise of his Faith.

If then Repentance in Time of Health be the only Repentance which can be supposed to be acceptable to God; it will be no Wonder to find (which was what I in the second Place proposed to shew you) that it is the only Repentance to which the Scripture-Promises of Pardon and Mercy are annexed. Repentance is Amendment of Life; it is to this Amendment therefore that are made all the Scripture-Promises of Pardon and Mercy. Repentance therefore, to intitle it to the Mercy of the Gospel, must be so early as to shew its Sincerity by its Fruits, an actual Amendment of Life; but this is out of the Power

Power of the dying Penitent, and therefore he has no Claim to the Promises of the Gospel.

The Rewards of Christianity are promised to those only who work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling: Eternal Life is reserved for those alone who seek for it, by patient Continuance in Well-doing; and in general we are all to be rewarded according to our Works. The christian Life is represented to us as a Race, in which, if we would obtain the Prize, we must run with Patience unto the End; and as a Warfare, in which the Conqueror is to be crowned.

Now if this be a true Representation of Christianity, what Hopes can the dying Penitent entertain? If he only is to be saved, who works out his Salvation with Fear and Trembling, what shall become of him who has all his Life-time neglected and despised it, and has nothing to offer in Compensation for that Neglect, but a little Sorrow at his Death? If eternal Life is reserved for those only who seek for it by patient Continuance in Well-doing, where is the Hope of the
dying

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dying Penitent, who has only the Repentance of his last Moments to plead in his Behalf? And if we are all to be rewarded according to our Works, the dying Penitent has none to alledge. If a Death-bed Repentance is available to Salvation, we can obtain the Prize without running for it, and be crowned without fighting.

But again. Christianity is not content with a small Degree of Virtue; it requires a Kind of Perfection in its Professors: It commands us to abound more and more in good Works, to seek that we may excell; and to go on unto Perfection. And if so, the Case of the dying Penitent is still more desperate, for he is but beginning, when it is expected he should be compleat. In short. The Rewards of the Gospel are held forth to those only, who live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World: To those only who have a good Life, or at least actual Amendment of Life, to alledge in their Favour: All who cannot produce true Fruits of Repentance (as the dying Penitent most certainly cannot) have, by the Terms of the Gospel, no Title to the Rewards of it.

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* If it be objected, that the Acceptance of the penitent Thief upon the Cross is an Instance of the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance, it may be answered, that from so extraordinary a Case, it is highly imprudent and unsafe to draw general Rules: For what Faith could be so extraordinary as his? To believe in a Saviour even at the very Moment he was expiring upon a Cross, in all the Circumstances of Infamy and Misery, is unparalleled Faith. He did not stay for Conviction till he should see him demonstrate himself to be the Son of God with Power,

• * The Case of the penitent Thief upon the Cross is a Case none of us can ever be in: We can be in no parallel Case, in no Case, bearing any Resemblance to it; and therefore no Encouragement can be drawn from that supposed Example.

And for the Parable of the Labourer hired into the Vineyard at the eleventh Hour, that, in its original Design, has respect only to the Calling of the Gentiles in the latter Ages of the World; but, if it be extended to private Persons, we are not in the Circumstances of the Labourers hired at the eleventh Hour. For we who are born in a christian Country, and have had the Means of Salvation always in our Power, have been called not in the Evening but in the Morning; in the Morning, I say, and have stood all the Day idle. The Labourers called late, wrought the little Time remaining; we who were called early, work not at all: Not even one Hour — not one Moment: For a Death-bed is not the *last Hour of working*, but the *Call of the Steward* to receive our Hire,

either

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either by coming down from the Cross, or by rising again from the dead. As his Faith therefore was so extraordinary, no Wonder that his Reward was so too. But further; this Thief believed in Christ as soon as called to the Knowledge of him; and if so, then according to the ordinary Rules of the Gospel, all his past Iniquities must be blotted out. But how different is this from their Case, who have all their Life-time done Despite to the Spirit of Grace, and then hope to be saved at last, by crying out, Lord, save us, we perish.

But if this Instance will not do, perhaps there is Ground for Consolation to the dying Penitent, in the Parable of the Labourers hired into the Vineyard; where he who wrought but one Hour, is made equal in his Wages, with those who had borne the Burden and Heat of the Day: But now this Parable, in its principal Design, has no Relation at all to this Matter. Its Design is to let the Jews know, that the Gentiles, who were called to the Knowledge of the Gospel at the eleventh Hour, in the Evening of the Day, in the last Age of the World; should be made equal in Happiness with themselves, who had

had so long before been the chosen People of God; who had been hired into the Vineyard in the Morning, in the first Hour of the Day.

But supposing this Parable can likewise be applied to the Case of particular Persons, it only teaches, that however a Person may have trod in the Ways of Destruction; yet, if he seriously repent, and for the little Time remaining, evidence the Sincerity of his Conversion, by bringing forth Fruits meet for Repentance; that then he shall be accepted, and all the Wickedness he hath done, shall not be once named unto him; but that in the little Righteousness which he hath done, in it shall he live. But this is not the Case of dying Penitents; for with them the Time of Work is quite over. The Day is spent, and the Evening is come, when the Lord of the Vineyard is calling his Servants, not to give them their Work, but their Hire.

This Parable indeed seems rather to conclude directly against the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance; for here is no Servant represented as receiving Wages without having wrought: He who did not come in till the eleventh Hour, yet laboured the remaining
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one. But the dying Penitent has not even the Work of one Hour to alledge; he has stood the whole Day idle, in spite of the repeated Importunities of his Lord to go and labour in his Vineyard.

There is not, therefore, the least Foundation in Scripture, for Hope in a Death-bed Repentance; nor indeed, can it reasonably be supposed there should be any; for,

Thirdly. To suppose a Death-bed Repentance generally available to Salvation, would be inconsistent with the Design of all Religion. The Design of Religion is to promote the Practice of Godliness and Virtue; but the Notion of the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance is absolutely destructive of such Practice. For this supposes, that a little Sorrow at last, will be a sufficient Compensation for a whole Life of Wickedness; and this Supposition renders a Life of Virtue unnecessary. For to what Purpose is it to thwart our Inclinations, to trouble ourselves about Religion, and rigidly to persist in the rugged and narrow Path of Virtue, if without all this Pain and Uneasiness we can secure Happiness at last, by a few Sighs and Tears. This is the greatest Encouragement to Vice —

This

This is to make the Hopes of Happiness hereafter, consistent with the Enjoyments of our Lusts and Passions here: This is to disarm Virtue of its Sanctions, to make both the Threats and Promises of God of none Effect. If then a Death-bed Repentance be allowed of, Religion is an Inconsistency; for by these Means it destroys its own Design, it defeats itself; and if Christianity accepted it, it would do more towards the corrupting of the World, than all its divine Precepts, all its glorious Promises and Threats could do towards the reforming it.

But fourthly. Repentance is in itself a Work extremely difficult to be performed upon a Death-bed, were it probable that it would be accepted; yet the Difficulty of performing it, is infinitely sufficient to deter every Man of common Prudence from trusting to it. There is perhaps no Word, more generally misunderstood than Repentance. The whole of it is thought to consist in Sorrow; and he who sighs and weeps, and vents a few bitter Expressions against himself and his Follies, is presently deemed a true Penitent. To do this indeed is an easy Task: Were this Repentance we might safely trust
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it to a Death-bed; but Repentance, in the Scripture Notion of it, is another Thing. It is there represented as a Change of Heart, of Mind, of Temper, and Disposition. When we are commanded to repent, we are commanded to be converted, turned about, or changed into Natures quite different from what we were before. Repentance is stiled Regeneration or a new Birth, and the Penitent a new Man. He is no longer to have the same Desires and Inclinations: What lately he did most passionately love, is now to be the Object of his Wrath and Detestation; and what was formerly his Aversion, must now be the beloved of his Soul. If then Repentance be such an entire Change as this, do we imagine so great a Change can be easily wrought: Do we think that we can so quickly part with our old Friends? That confirmed and inveterate Habits are so easily broken off? But let us not deceive ourselves, for sooner may the Æthiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots, than they can do Good who are accustomed to do Evil. Repentance is a Business both of Time and Difficulty; such a Change, as Repentance, cannot be instantaneous. Repentance there-fore

fore is a Work, which, in the ordinary Course of Things, seems impossible to be performed upon a Sick-bed; and that in Fact it is not performed, is often demonstrable from hence, that if the Sinner be restored to his Health, and indulged another Trial, he returns to the same Excess of Riot, and becomes as much, sometimes tenfold more, the Child of Hell than he was before.

But may it not be asked, that if the Case of the dying Penitent be so desperate as is represented; if all absolutely depends upon the past Life, to what Purpose are all Exhortations to the dying Sinner: Why is he called upon to repent, if we know his Repentance is to no Purpose? Why are the Means of Grace applied to him, who is irrecoverably fallen from Grace? If all depends upon what we have done in our Health, every thing that can be done either by the righteous or the wicked, upon a Death-bed, is useless and insignificant. By no Means: It is surely of Use to the best of Men, to have Opportunity to trim their Lamps, just when the Cry is made that the Bridegroom cometh, that they may go out to meet him with the greater Decency and Composure.

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And as for the wicked, though nothing they can do upon their Death-bed is to be depended on, yet nothing should be left undone. They should catch at every thing which has but a bare Possibility of saving them. It is better to repent then, than never. It is the best, it is the only Thing Men in their Circumstances can do. And as for Admonitions and Exhortations they may perhaps, in some Degree, soften the stony Heart.

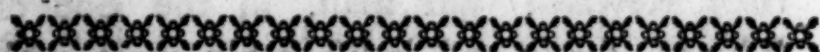
But let no Man deceive himself by trusting to any thing but a good Life or a timely Repentance; for nothing else can, with the least Shadow of Reason, be trusted to. Nothing but one of these can give us rational Comfort and Assurance in the Hour of Death and in the Day of Judgment.

S E R M O N.



S E R M O N XV.

*Of the perfect Man, and his
peaceful End.*



P S A L M xxxvii. 37.

*Mark the perfect Man, and behold
the upright: For the End of that
Man is Peace.*



THE Book of Psalms is a rich and noble Treasure both of Devotion and Instruction. Its rapturous Hymns are so many refined Lessons; their divine Composers thus endeavouring, while they themselves mount up to

Heaven, to leave a Portion of their Spirit on all around them.

Of the Instruction contained in them, we have an Instance now before us: "Mark the perfect Man, and behold the upright: For the End of that Man is Peace." Or, as it is otherwise translated, keep Innocency, and take heed to the Thing that is right, for that shall bring a Man Peace at the last. The Sense is the same in both, and it is this; that Religion and Virtue, Innocence, Uprightness and Integrity, shall in no wise lose their Reward; but shall, in the End of Things, surely and indisputably meet with Peace, their due and proper Recompence.

It is evident, (nothing is more so) that the sure and certain Hope of some Recompence of Reward, at the End and Conclusion of Things, is absolutely necessary to make us courageously and steadily persevere in the Ways of Righteousness and Godliness, at present; for Righteousness and Godliness, however in themselves the most excellent of all Things, do yet in this State manifestly labour under great Discouragements. Men of Virtue and Conscience are not always the
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most prosperous and successful : The Goods of Fortune are not the natural Attendants of Righteousness ; so far from it, that the *best* of Men are often the *lowest* of Men too : And (which only affects the present Matter) reduced to and kept in that irksome contemptible State, by Means of that very Righteousness ; while at the same Time they have the Mortification to see Men of other Principles fare better, even the cruel one, of seeing them mount up to the Summit of Glory and Grandeur, by trampling upon all Laws human and divine ; by sacrificing their Consciences, and quitting that Virtue, which the righteous are so tenacious of.

Besides this ; there are Temptations of another Kind. We are liable to be seduced, not only by Considerations of Profit or Honour, but by those of Pleasure too. The Lusts and Appetites of Men are headstrong and unruly, and are with much Pain and Mortification, and Self-denial, kept under and restrained from breaking out into Violence. No little Trouble is it, the most dispassionate must confess, to keep them within the narrow Limits which Religion and Virtue do prescribe.

From these two Causes then it is plain, that the steady Practice of Righteousness and Virtue must be attended with considerable Difficulties and Uneasinesses; with so many and so great, that if nothing but the present Scene of Affairs be taken into our Account, it does not appear upon what Foundation a wise Man could undertake it, or, at least, have Resolution enough to persist in it. — If a Man of Thought gives up, what is manifestly for his Interest, he will certainly have something in View, by way of Compensation: If he parts with a present Grant, 'tis doubtless in Hopes of a better in Reversion. — And if a Man of Pleasure denies himself a present Gratification, it must certainly be because he expects Amends to be made to him by some superior Pleasure hereafter; for Self-denial and Mortification are Things too painful to be undergone for nothing.

To encourage us then in the Practice of Virtue, to make that Practice reasonable; there must be some Counterpoise to the Pains and Difficulties which attend it. There must be some Equivalent in View, some Prospect of future Good, to entertain and fix our Attention;

tion; to divert our Thoughts from our present disagreeable Circumstances, or to animate and support us under them. — Did Religion fail in this, it would fail in an essential Point; for however it might endeavour to recommend itself upon the Score of its *Excellence*, it would be but little regarded, if it did not shew itself to be our *Interest*.

Religion then is full to this Point, and comes up to what our warmest Wishes could desire. It shews us in the strongest and most affecting Manner, that there is an End; and that in the Time of the End, the Wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him, and the Righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him: That all Men shall then meet with their Deserts; the wicked, in Punishment; the virtuous, in Reward. — The so much envied Prosperity of Villains shall conclude in a grievous Ruin — The Transgressors shall be destroyed together, and the End of the wicked shall be cut off. — The present coveted Enjoyments of Vice shall prove in the End bitter as Wormwood: For however sweet they may be in the Mouth, however agreeable and palatable in the going down,

yet a little while and we shall dearly pay for the luscious Morfel — which will be turned into the Gall of Asps within us. — But as for the righteous it shall not be so with them; all their Difficulties and Distresses shall be crowned with Joy unmixed, with Happiness unallayed: “For mark the perfect Man, and behold the upright; for the End of that Man is Peace.”

In speaking further to which Words I shall shew,

First. What is meant by the perfect and upright Man.

Secondly. What is the full Import of *Peace*, his promised Recompence.

And thirdly. Press you to aspire after this exalted Character in Prospect of this, its exceeding great Reward.

And first. Who is this perfect and upright Man? Uprightness and Integrity are commonly thought to be but other Words for Honesty; for moral Honesty, as it stands opposed to Invasion of Property, and to all Manner of Fraud and Deceit: Honesty, in this Sense, is set up as the great, as indeed the one only cardinal Virtue, to the Dishonour, almost to the utter Exclusion of all the

the rest. And a Man, who upon reflecting on his Conduct, finds himself in this Light an *honest* Man, without more ado pronounces himself a good Man, and with great Confidence looks upon himself as Heir of all the glorious Promises which the Gospel has annexed to universal Righteousness. One would think, by this Conduct, that there had not been Ten Commandments, but only one, delivered on Mount *Sinai*; or that Christianity, in Compassion to our Infirmities, had reduced them to this one. But the contrary to this, we well know to be true. — We know that Christianity not only confirms all these Laws, but likewise greatly extends and enlarges our Duty: That it has made the Commandment exceeding broad, and raised it also exceeding high, even to an Height unthought of before. — Do we then think that all this is done for nothing; or that a System of Laws so absolutely perfect was formed only to amuse us? To raise our Admiration without influencing our Practice? Where do we find any Hint, any the least imaginable Intimation, that all the Laws are not obligatory? That there is any Exception or Dispensation allowed of? So far from it, that

that universal Obedience is pressed, and enforced upon us in the strongest possible Manner; even to that Degree, as to declare, that one indulged Vice shall vacate the Title, and destroy the Merit of every Virtue we possess, though it were every other Virtue in the whole Catalogue: That it shall even involve us in the Guilt of universal Disobedience — “Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend but in one Point, is guilty of all.”

As to the Virtue of moral Honesty in particular, what has been said of it does not tend to lessen the Guilt and Heinousness of a Violation of it, but on the contrary to aggravate and encrease it. For the blacker and more enormous any Crime is, the less always is the Merit of keeping clear of it. Thus no Man values himself upon his not being guilty of Murder, Incest, Adultery, and the like. No! to be guilty of these, is to be Sinners of the first Magnitude. They require the most hardened and abandoned Hearts; as they are Instances of the most outrageous Wickedness. And therefore all that we can boast of, from our Innocence in such Articles, is barely this, that we are not among
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the worst of Men. — And so with respect to what is called Honesty; the Breach of it is so highly wicked, requires so low, base, and degenerate a Spirit; is both so unmanly and so unchristian, that to be free from Offences of this Kind, is very little Merit. To be an *honest Man* in this Sense, is strictly no more than this; not to be a *Knave*. And though Men even of this Stamp are, I am afraid, much rarer than is imagined; yet there is no Man, I am sure, would take this Character for a Compliment.

It is then Matter of Amazement to see this Virtue set foremost in the List; to hear it cry'd up to a Degree so extravagant, as even to be an Equivalent for the Want of the rest. How often do we hear it pleaded in Mitigation and Abatement of the blackest Crimes; how often is it sagely and gravely maintained, that though such a one is, it must be owned, greatly vitious and irregular in his Conduct; though he be not perhaps a Believer, or a Christian, yet nevertheless he is as honest a Man as ever was born: The fairest Dealer in the World between Man and Man. Indeed? A most exalted Character truly. It is just as much as to say, he is an
extremely

extremely *good* Man, because he is not an Housebreaker, an Highwayman, or a Pick-pocket. Glorious Atonement this! for Blasphemy against God our Saviour; for Treason against the State, for the Murder of a Neighbour, or for the Defilement of his Bed; notable Equivalent for Infidelity and Debauchery.

Why so much Merit is attributed to this Virtue, nothing is easier than to see. They who plead it, and in whose Favour it is pleaded, know very well, that from it arises all the Title which they have to Merit of any Kind; and since this is so, it behoves them to make the most of that little they possess. — Though still to take from it, and to lessen even that little, it is to be observed, that they are commonly Persons who are above all Temptations to Dishonesty; and that Dishonesty is a Crime they would abstain from for the Sake of their Reputations, though Religion were out of the Question; as indeed it absolutely is in this and every other Question with them.

But be as honest as you will in this limited Sense, it will by no means intitle you to the Character of a perfect and upright Man,
Innocence,

Innocence, Uprightness, Integrity, Perfection, are all of them Words of general Extent, and imply an universal Obedience without Exception, Limitation, or Reserve. *Innocence* is Freedom from all Guilt; the Moment the least Crime is committed, that Character is gone. *Uprightness* is Straitness or Rectitude; from which the least possible Deviation is a Departure. *Integrity*, an equivalent Expression, is *Entireness*: And *Perfection* admits of no *Deficiency*; nothing must be wanting either in Extent or Degree. This is the natural Meaning of the Words; and in this Sense is *Honestum* taken by the antient Moralists. In them it stands for every thing that is fit and decorous, every thing that is good and praise-worthy in Life; in short, for every Instance of Duty. And so the Poet joins *Integer Vitæ, Scelerisque purus*; the upright and the innocent together; the latter as explanatory of the former: And this is the scriptural Meaning of them too. Thus we find that Hero in Virtue, *Job*, explaining his Sentiments of Righteousness and Integrity (general Phrases which he often uses) by a very accurate and particular Vindication of his Conduct, upon all the several Branches
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of Duty to God, his Neighbour and himself. And indeed had not his Integrity taken in all these Branches, he could not have been free, (as he affirmed he was) from all Reproach of Heart. Nor therefore, unless the Uprightness and Perfection of the Text be taken in the same universal Sense, can this Consequence of them be Peace. For all Failures in Duty, of what Sort soever, are necessarily followed by Reproach of Heart: And wherever there is Reproach of Heart, there cannot possibly be Peace.

The true Notion of Uprightness and Integrity consists in this: That a Man does that, and that only, which after the best Information he can get, his Heart and Conscience approve. The *Object* of this Integrity must be *universal*, and the *Practice* of it *steady* — The Object, Duty in general. The Thing that is right; whatever is right, whatever is proper for us to do, with regard either to God, our Neighbour, or ourselves. The Object is universal of Course: For as Integrity consists in a strict Agreement between our Actions and our Sentiments; the Moment we do that Thing, let it be what it will, which at the same Time we are convinced

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in our Hearts and Consciences is *wrong*, that Moment we let go our Righteousness, and remove our Integrity from us. Whoever then neglects and despises the Offices of Religion, which have God for their immediate Object: And whoever is intemperate, vicious, and profligate in his Behaviour, is as far from being an upright Person, as the most unfair Dealer between Man and Man; equally forfeits his Integrity, and is as truly *dishonest* in the proper Sense of that Word, as if he had been guilty of the greatest Outrages upon Property.

Integrity requires likewise a steady and invariable Practice. It is not sufficient that we now and then, by Fits and Starts, practise our Duty. No! we must be constant and uniform in it; we must adhere to it; adhere to it closely and strictly; in Spite both of all Opposition, and of all Temptation: *Immoveable as a Rock, by Opposition; deaf as an Adder, to Temptation.* No Awe of Greatness, no Dread of Power, no instant Tortures can affright from his Duty; no Riches bribe, Honours flatter, or Pleasures charm from it. He is Proof against all Assaults from whatever Quarter they come; inflexibly virtuous, obstinately

of Duty to God, his Neighbour and himself. And indeed had not his Integrity taken in all these Branches, he could not have been free, (as he affirmed he was) from all Reproach of Heart. Nor therefore, unless the Uprightness and Perfection of the Text be taken in the same universal Sense, can this Consequence of them be Peace. For all Failures in Duty, of what Sort soever, are necessarily followed by Reproach of Heart: And wherever there is Reproach of Heart, there cannot possibly be Peace.

The true Notion of Uprightness and Integrity consists in this: That a Man does that, and that only, which after the best Information he can get, his Heart and Conscience approve. The *Object* of this Integrity must be *universal*, and the *Practice* of it *steady* — The Object, Duty in general. The Thing that is right; whatever is right, whatever is proper for us to do, with regard either to God, our Neighbour, or ourselves. The Object is universal of Course: For as Integrity consists in a strict Agreement between our Actions and our Sentiments; the Moment we do that Thing, let it be what it will, which at the same Time we are convinced
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in our Hearts and Consciences is *wrong*, that Moment we let go our Righteousness, and remove our Integrity from us. Whoever then neglects and despises the Offices of Religion, which have God for their immediate Object: And whoever is intemperate, vitious, and profligate in his Behaviour, is as far from being an upright Person, as the most unfair Dealer between Man and Man; equally forfeits his Integrity, and is as truly *dishonest* in the proper Sense of that Word, as if he had been guilty of the greatest Outrages upon Property.

Integrity requires likewise a steady and invariable Practice. It is not sufficient that we now and then, by Fits and Starts, practise our Duty. No! we must be constant and uniform in it; we must adhere to it; adhere to it closely and strictly; in Spite both of all Opposition, and of all Temptation: *Immoveable as a Rock, by Opposition; deaf as an Adder, to Temptation.* No Awe of Greatness, no Dread of Power, no instant Tortures can affright from his Duty; no Riches bribe, Honours flatter, or Pleasures charm from it. He is Proof against all Assaults from whatever Quarter they come; inflexibly virtuous, obstinately

stinately just. See this Character gloriously exemplified in *Job*.

From this Description of Uprightness and Perfection, let us now, in the second Place, pass on to their Reward. This is said, to be Peace at the last: The End of that Man is Peace. — Peace is in Scripture-Language, a Phrase of much larger Import than in its common Use and Acceptation: It strictly signifies no more than Quiet and Tranquillity, in Opposition to Trouble and Disturbance. But in the sacred Writers it is much more comprehensive; for in them it stands for the greatest and fullest Happiness; and when they would express at once the greatest of Blessings, particularly those of a spiritual and heavenly Nature, they sum them up in *Peace*. — Thus Almighty God tells his People, that he will give unto them his Covenant of Peace; and that they shall enter into Peace: And our blessed Saviour, a little before he was separated from his Disciples, gives them his Blessing in these Words: “Peace I leave
“with you, my Peace I give unto you.” And this Use of the Word is highly proper and emphatical: Peace being not only a great Happiness in itself, but also that without
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which there can be none from any other Cause. It is the Foundation of all Happiness; outward Peace of that which is temporal, and inward Peace of that which is spiritual.

This Peace or Happiness is promised to the perfect and upright Man at the last; at the End and Conclusion of this transitory Scene; at the shutting up of which a new World is to open to us; a World, which shall not pass away like this, but which shall endure even to Eternity. The two *last* Things are then our Exit out of this State, and our Entrance upon the next: Our Condition at the Time of our Departure out of the one, and our fixed and everlasting Condition in the other. If the perfect and upright Man meets with Happiness in these two Situations, the Observation of the Psalmist in the Text is abundantly verified, that the *End* of that Man is *Peace*.

Let us view him first at the Close of this Life: Place him then on the Bed of Languishing; let inward Feelings give Notice of Dissolution; let Art declare herself ineffectual; let every Circumstance conspire to convince him, that the sovereign Lord of

Life and Death has pronounced the irreversible Sentence, — He shall surely die. Let then all the Pomp of Death surround him; and let the grim King of Terrors make hasty Advances. How does this Hero behave in these trying Circumstances? Is he alarmed at the Tidings? Does he shew any Signs of Fear, Surprize, or Discomposure? No: That be far from him; he receives them unruffled and unmoved; calm, settled, and undismayed: His Countenance, the true Picture of his Mind, *clear* as that Conscience which supports him; *serene*, as that Heaven he is going to. So far from thinking them *heavy Tidings*, he receives them as the best he ever heard. As for the King of Terrors, so far from shrinking at the Sight of him, that he bids him welcome; he goes forth in his Strength, and even meets him half Way. Let him cloath himself in all the Horror he can devise, and set himself in full Array; yet the perfect Man laughs at his feeble Efforts; because to a good Man it is not in the Power even of Death to look terrible: To him, his Visage *alters*; its Roughness becomes *smooth*; its Contractedness *opens*, and its
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its Darkness *brightens*: However on the rest of Mankind he is wont to *frown*, on the *perfect* he is always sure to *smile*.

The Prospect of immediate Death; the immediate Consequence of which, is Appearance before the Judgment-Seat of God, is doubtless an awakening Consideration. It therefore necessarily disposes him to look into himself, and examine narrowly whether he be in perfect Readiness for his Trial. He enters upon the Scrutiny without Fear, and returns from it with Confidence. His new Inquiry serves but to give him new Spirits; to strengthen his Hope, to double his Courage; and with fresh Vigour and Alacrity to make him urge his everlasting Way.

Let him turn his Eyes which Way he will; backward or forward let him look, nothing does he behold but what affords him Consolation, but what administers Joy.— If *backward*, a Life well spent instantly presents itself; if *forward*, Heaven opens to his View. In Retrospect he beholds a solid Foundation for his Hopes; in Prospect, the Enjoyment of them; behind him, a victorious Warfare; before him, the Triumph of a Conqueror.

It is but a Moment, and all his Expectations are answered to the full: He does but forget himself, and lo! Faith is turned into Sight, and Hope into Fruition. He finds himself safely landed in Eternity; secure Partaker of all those good Things which God has prepared for those that love him; of those Joys which Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard; and which it hath not entered into the Heart of Man to conceive.

But to what has been said, it may possibly be objected; that as Perfection is not attainable by Man, neither consequently is the Reward of it; that as the Character is above his Ability, so its Recompence is beyond his Expectation. — Absolute and compleat Perfection is not indeed the Lot of Mortality: Perfect, in the full Sense of that Word, never was there any *Man* but one; — but He was *God* too. — And He, (whose *Divinity* did not render him insensible of the Weakness of *Humanity*) has told us, that such Perfection he does not require at our Hands; but then he insists upon *Sincerity* in the Stead of it; *i. e.* he insists upon our best and most earnest Endeavours; that we should hunger and thirst after Righteousness; that
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we should pant and aspire after it: That we should be as upright as we possibly can be; as perfect, as the utmost Exertion of all the Faculties both of Soul and Body will admit. This if we do, he promises to accept us; and has purchased for our weak but honest Endeavours all those great and glorious Things, which were before due only to absolute and compleat Obedience.

There are two Sorts of Men concerned in this Question: — the first, those who have never been guilty of any great and notorious Breach of the Laws of God; and who have from the first Dawnings of their Understanding, lived to the uttermost of their Power, in the constant, steady, uniform Practice of their Duty in all its several Relations: These, (though not indeed free from all Sin,) yet being free from gross Sin, and adhering likewise to a regular Discharge of Duty, are stiled *innocent* and *perfect*. — The others, those who having fallen into flagrant Crimes, or having for some Time neglected and despised the Laws and Service of God, come at last to their right Minds; turn into the Ways of Righteousness and Virtue; and are desirous to atone for their past ill Conduct,

by entering upon a new one — And these are called *Penitents*.

Now with regard to these latter, nothing is more certain, than that if their Conversion be sincere, and their future Behaviour prove agreeable to the Laws of God, their Repentance will be accepted; and the Reward of good and faithful Servants conferred on them. This is the uniform Voice of both Testaments. Thus the Old declares, “ That when
“ the wicked Man turneth away from his
“ Wickedness, that he hath committed, and
“ doth that which is lawful and right, he
“ shall save his Soul alive; because he con-
“ sidereth and turneth away from all his
“ Transgressions that he hath committed, he
“ shall surely live, he shall not die.” And as for Christianity, the whole Scheme of that is to call Sinners to Repentance.

But though all Penitents are thus entitled to the Promises of God; and though the *Repentance* of some, who labour more abundantly, may possibly outdo in Merit the *Innocence* of others; yet upon the whole, it must be confessed, that the former Sort of Men, the perfect and innocent, have in the common Course of Things infinitely the Advantage;

vantage; for to need no Repentance, must certainly be highly preferable to Repentance: Just as a sound Constitution is preferable to a repaired one. The innocent are always in the right Way; the penitent have confessedly deviated from it, but are returned. And can these be compared? No sure! For the Penitents, after their Conversion, are but *where* they should have *always* been. — It is true indeed, our blessed Saviour tells us, that there is Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just Persons, which need no Repentance: But does he intend, think ye, by this Saying, to give Repentance the Preference to Innocence? By no means; he only speaks after the manner of Men, and represents heavenly Transactions in a Way intelligible to earthly Capacities. As the sudden Recovery of what we once thought lost, gives us here on Earth a very sensible Joy; often raises it to such a Degree, that we seem to overlook our much more valuable Possessions, which were never in Danger: So in Heaven, is the Joy represented upon the Conversion of a Sinner. The Conversion of a Sinner is

a Recovery of great Difficulty and great Value; and in Proportion to the Difficulty and Value of the Rescue, rises the Joy of the heavenly Host; not to the Disparagement of the righteous; No! their Righteousness had always given, and did then give them equal Delight: All the Difference is this; that upon so extraordinary an Occasion, as the Conversion of a Sinner, their Joy was extraordinary too; while the Satisfaction they have in the Views of the righteous, is constant, equable, and uniform. That this is the true Meaning of this Passage is unquestionably clear, from the two Parables of the lost Piece of Silver, and the lost Sheep, which are added as Explanations of it. For it is not to be imagined, that the two Persons should be better pleased; the one, with one Piece of Silver, than with nine; and the other, with one Sheep, than his whole Flock: This I say, is not to be imagined, No; but they both found what they had given over for lost, and therefore their Joy was extraordinary, for their unexpected good Fortune. — Our Lord's Intention is then plainly this, to shew us the immense Value
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of immortal Souls, when the Salvation of but one of them causes a Joy so extraordinary in the Presence of God.

But to return. However great may be the Rewards of Repentance, as they undoubtedly are great; yet there is one Circumstance, in which the *penitent* must always fall short of the *innocent*; and that is, in Peace of Mind. — Sorrows and Doubts, Tears and Fears, Distrusts and Misgivings are the natural necessary Attendants of Repentance; while Innocence is fearless of Evil: Manly Courage and rational Intrepidity are its inseparable Companions. The Hope and Confidence of the innocent are pure and unallayed, while those of the most established Penitent partake of a very considerable Mixture: Upon every Occasion their old Wounds break open, and bleed afresh; and every Reflection upon past Life abashes and confounds them.

From hence, let Instruction flow to those happy few, who have not yet forfeited their Innocence; to those who have not yet bowed the Knee to *Baal*; who have not yet *sold* their Integrity; who have not yet been overcharged with Surfeiting and Drunkenness;

ness; who have not yet been defiled with Women; who have not yet, in one Word, violated their Consciences by any great and notorious Crime. Let these happy few, I say, learn from hence to be infinitely tenacious of this most valuable of all Possessions, their Innocence; be not either frightened, or laughed out of it: Be assured none will attempt to do either, who have not first forfeited their own. And above all Temptations, beware of that flattering one, that all will be made right by Repentance and Amendment: Repentance and Amendment are After-games; the only Things that can be done in a broken Condition; and who in his Wits would bring himself into that Condition, that could avoid it? Be not then decoyed out of your strong Hold of Innocence, upon this or any Pretence whatsoever; quit it not as you value your Peace; your Peace at the Hour of Death, and in the Day of Judgment.

After what has been said, a very few Words will be sufficient, in the third Place, to press you to aspire after the Character of the perfect and upright Man, *i. e.* after the Character of a good Man in the christian Sense,

Sense, from the Expectation of that solid, substantial, and consummate Peace, which is to be his exceeding great Reward. — As all Men are mortal, and the Hour of Death is an Hour, which every Individual of the Species must expect; and as it is an Hour of the greatest Distress which Mortals know; an Hour, in which all the Succours they can raise, are commonly little enough to support them; one would think that we should not want much Admonition to provide for it. How happy and how miserable we are capable of being in that critical Season, let every Man look into himself, and he will see. Few there are, perhaps, among us, who have not one Time or other had a near Prospect of Death; who have not thought themselves upon the Brink of Eternity: If a long State of Health has not quite worn out the Remembrance of all that then passed, recollect a little; and if you were good Men, if you were conscious of a Life spent in the uniform Practice of Religion and Virtue; say, if from the first Moment of your Being, you ever knew what it was to be happy before; if you ever before felt a Complacency so serene, a Satisfaction so solid, a Joy so exalted:

exalted: Say, if you did not think all the Pain, and Mortification, and Self denial which your Virtue cost you, amply recompensed, even over-paid by this Peace at the last. — If you were wicked Men, and in your View of past Life saw nothing but Sins, and Offences, and Transgressions; say, if you ever before knew such Misery: Was it not bitter as Wormwood; sharp as a two-edged Sword? Did it not pierce even to the dividing asunder of the Joints and Marrow? Say, if you did not arraign and condemn your past Conduct, and even stand amazed how a reasonable Creature could be so blind to its Interest? Say, if you did not think all the Pleasures of Sin, now past and gone, as a Dream in the Night, dearly purchased with such Misery at last? Say likewise, if you did not resolve (steadily as you then thought) if another Trial was indulged, to alter your Behaviour for the future, and to be more wise for the Time to come. Your Judgment of Things at that Time, you cannot but now approve; and therefore it would be your Prudence to regulate your Conduct by it; for into this State you will assuredly again be brought. And no thinking Man who has once been in
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it, but will readily allow, that Peace at the last is a sufficient Encouragement to Uprightness and Perfection. As to those who have not been in this Condition, by the Help of a little Imagination they may easily put themselves into it; and if they do, they will find themselves affected in the same Manner: And to put themselves now and then into an imaginary State, which will one Day most certainly be actual and real, would perhaps be no unuseful Employment.

But whatever becomes of Peace at the Hour of Death, if that is not of sufficient Value, Peace in Heaven will, I hope, be allowed to be so: An Happiness, in Degree inconceivable, and in Duration endless! No present Sufferings surely, but what this will overpay!

This is the final Reward of the perfect and upright Man: Thus his End is Peace. — And indeed the Prospect of this peaceful End has a powerful Influence upon his present Life, and renders even that, notwithstanding all the Difficulties he meets with, peaceful too. Death is an Affair of such Consequence, and to which we are so much exposed,

exposed, that no Peace can dwell in that Breast, that *fears* it. — And it is likewise such a sovereign Medicine of Life, that nothing can disturb his Peace who is prepared for it. Thus Peace is not only the *final* but even the *present* Recompence of Virtue. The virtuous are sure of consummate Happiness in the *End*; and the Sense of that constitutes them happy *now*. — So true in every Light is that Saying of the Prophet: The Work of Righteousness shall be Peace; and the Effect of Righteousness, Quietness and Assurance *for ever*.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



